DANIEL AARON

Parables of Disorder

> "Some maladies are so grave that we die of them; others, though not exactly mortal, are such as may be observed and felt without much study; finally, there are some that are hardly recognizable without a microscope. But then they look perfectly awful. This microscope is—hypochondria. I believe that if men were really to set themselves to study these microscopical diseases, they would have the satisfaction of being ill every day of their lives."
>
> —Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

THE NOVELS[1] TO BE DISCUSSED HERE FALL, or may be pushed, into three categories, although each manages to escape obvious classification by borrowing some features from the others. For convenience, I shall call these types the Super-Slick, the Personal-Private, and the Everyman. The distinctions between them, if somewhat invidious, have nothing to do with theme or subject matter but everything to do with *intention:* the author's attitude toward himself, his audience, and his times.

William Gibson's *The Cobweb* is a good illustration of the Super-Slick. This well-upholstered book records the reverberations of what began as a trivial incident in a mental clinic. How will the carefully typed characters—patients and staff—behave when placed in this "morally interesting situation"? The conflicts Mr. Gibson sets up are varied and inter-related: the institutional problem of outside interference is one strand in the cobweb, but the peculiar neurosis of a patient and the marital burdens of the two principal doctors complete the web until everyone is "inextricably caught in a tangle and weaving of each other, like a giant cobweb, each strung to each hand and foot."

This idea has haunted a number of writers more interesting than Mr. Gibson, but it is a serious one, and he has wound up and unravelled his spool with a tidiness and precision that is as admirable as it is pointless. The characters he re-animates (for by now they are drearily familiar) are the once able medico on the skids, the charming and humane hero-doctor married to a golden doll with "sloe eyes", the salty spinster retainer, the Hepburnish young widow whose sturdy tweediness contrasts favorably with the frequently-mentioned embonpoint of the narcissistic wife. Further sophisticated improvements featured in this shiny model are as follows: vulgarisms and smart low talk, a knowledge of frocks and unguents, bathroom details (heroes can now urinate as well as

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[1]THE COBWEB, by *William Gibson.* Knopf. $3.95. THE WARS OF LOVE, by *Mark Schorer.* McGraw Hill. $3.00. THE END OF AN OLD SONG, by *J. D. Scott.* Knopf. $3.50. SCOTLAND'S BURNING, by *Nathaniel Burt.* Little Brown. $3.50. THE PROSPECT BEFORE US, by *Herbert Gold.* The World Publishing Company. $3.50. BORN IN CAPTIVITY, by *John Wain.* Knopf. $3.50. THE JOKER, by *Jean Malaquais.* Doubleday. $3.95.

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shower), bedroom procedures clinically rendered, easy references to Bartók and Modigliani, and in general a bold front to life's unmentionables.

A blurb on a recent paper-cover collection of "New Writing" bears the legend: "Avant Garde Means You! Avant garde may sound stuffy—but it only means a reconnaissance party." *The Cobweb* indicates the success of this silent infiltration and the extent to which the attitudes and materials of wild men have been domesticated for large-scale consumption. The terrible realities are vacuumed and reprocessed. Hollywood has already snapped up *The Cobweb.* It will have to delete Mr. Gibson's ugly expletives and euphemize the love-making, but in all other respects this liberal, talented, melodramatic, deft, and workmanlike book should provide an ideal script for the movie-makers.

The Wars of Love, Scotland's Burning, and *The End of an Old Song* begin in the personal and private world of childhood, largely if not entirely ignored in *The Cobweb,* and examine with mixed success the experiences and portents of adolescence. Novels of this sort, introspective and psychological and often pedantically symbolic, sometimes read like the exorcisms of private grievances. In each of these novels, for example, the narrator is recollecting in untranquillity, and the children dredged up from the pool of memory are writer's children —beardless devils or nubile Circes or super-sensitive recorders too priggishly acute. Although the action in each of these three novels is less important than feeling or the effects of the action, they all rumble with catastrophe. Fires figure prominently in two of them, a double murder in the third, as if guilt and self-deception and masochism and perversion were not enough to redeem vacuity. Of the three, Mark Schorer's is the most ambitious and the most intrinsically interesting, although despite its sensitivity and intelligence it is an imperfect and disappointing book.

The Wars of Love is a Jamesian shocker about four people whose involvement begins during a bitter-sweet childhood and ends in unconvincing maturity. The narrator, deceiving and self-deceived, is telling the story as a peripheral observer, but it soon becomes clear that his life is hopelessly enmeshed with the others. Daniel Ford has killed his wife, Milly, and his partner, Freddy Grabhorn. So we are told by the "I"—Grant Norman, who will provide the logic for this war of love.

The first and by far the best part of the book describes an idyllic and yet somehow sinister summer interlude with the three boys and the girl clinging to one another in a half-loving, half-hostile alliance. They are Jazz-age siblings, refugees from parental indifference or over-solicitude. But their companionship, beautifully sustained and believable in childhood, becomes merely geometrical in part two, the winter of their discontent. Now their carefully planted traits blossom rather unattractively as the narrator discovers his three friends after a long hiatus living together in unwholesome intimacy. Milly has married the gentlest and weakest of the boys, absorbing his child-like sweetness. She has also absorbed the Fascistic cruelty of the ruthless and ambitious Grabhorn, recognizable as a child but not as an adult. Unsuccessfully she tries to complete

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herself by becoming Norman's mistress, and it is he, motivated ostensibly by his affection and concern for the mentally broken husband but actually out of spite and frustration, who precipitates the tragedy. He belongs to the family of Henry James's malevolent fools and snoopers who disorganize what they seek to order.

The situation is less intense if not basically dissimilar in *The End of an Old Song*, a well-written "romance" of uncertain meaning but presumably another variation on the theme of Chekhov—mellow oldness yielding to brash newness. Here the story teller, an ineffectual and rueful romanticist, records in a series of flashbacks his association with his friend Alastair, an illegitimate son of a daft Scottish laird, Captain Keith. Their friendship begins at Nethervale, a second-rate public school for the children of newly rich Scottish business men, but it is at Kingisbyres, Captain Keith's tradition-ridden Jacobite house, that Patrick and Alastair meet Catharine. She is a wild pretty girl sprung from the loins of a biscuit manufacturer. Alastair, a distillation of Heathcliff, Carlyle, Bazarov, with a dash of Julien Sorel—a figure almost too large for the book—manages to steal Catharine from Patrick, succeed in business, and brutally repudiate a past that continues to entrance his romantic and unambitious friend. At the end, Alastair leaves a blazing Kingisbyres he has himself ignited for a tradition-less America. The point of the novel, the personal-private point, is constantly being overwhelmed by scenic atmosphere (very well executed) and by entertaining irrelevancies.

To pass from Mr. Scott's holocaust to Nathaniel Burt's *Scotland's Burning* requires no great mental leap, since the latter's book also deals with a second-rate boy's school (American this time), and the action is chronicled in one long and painful reminiscence. Tony Comstock dips into "a dim reservoir of thoughts" after twenty-five years and tells of his life at the Dixon School and of the moral dilemma that he failed to solve. Mr. Burt writes surely and delicately about a boy's confrontation of evil. He catches the mixture of hokum and tender sentiment that pervades the prep school atmosphere, and he knowingly observes the eccentric masters, the embarrassed facetiousness of the adult in the presence of somber adolescence, and the anguish of growth. *Scotland's Burning* abounds with fine over-ripe poetic passages that ought to have been ruthlessly pruned. The first-person point of view, moreover, is disturbing, because adult awareness constantly impinges upon the naive disorder of boyhood. But despite lush prose and the too intrusive consciousness of the narrator, this is a well-made and even moving book.

Scotland's Burning ends in school-boy arson and the perverted destruction of a dormitory (what would our novelists do without the finalty of flame?), and Herbert Gold's *The Prospect Before Us* closes with a hotel fire that burns up the Everyman hero. Here the similarity ends, for the latter novel has nothing to do with playing fields or the penalties of puberty. Harry Bowers is a kind of Cleveland Leopold Bloom who runs the Green Glade Hotel on Prospect Street, "the best building, the nicest parcel, the loveliest property you could

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want there among the fried-eggeries, the beer-and-tar strollers, the spitting hopers." Mr. Gold, a man of many occupations, once worked as a night-manager of a hotel, and although he avoids Balzacian catalogues, he has captured Hotel-ness as well as the sounds, smells, and colors of Prospect Street and the hard funny talk of the chiselers and pimps who trod its pavements.

Harry Bowers is sitting pretty until a beautiful Negro girl with high breasts and a Columbia degree persuades him to rent her a room in his sleazy hotel. He does this not as a liberal gesture toward the Civil Rights organization that plants her there, but out of perverseness and sexual desire, half-aware of the probable consequences, yet drawn closer and closer to the girl as his outraged *lumpen* clientele and the Prospect Avenue Businessmen's Association proceed to ruin him. It is only then that Harry, with the aid of his messy brother and a fantastic little whoremonger named Jake, resorts to arson, a deed foreshadowed from the first pages. Besides the incomparable Jake with his "soft yellow butter-crumb face", a number of subsidiary characters—each authentically sketched in Gold's expressive prose—are a part of "Harry's Happy Green Glade Familee", but it is Harry who properly dominates the book. He is as natural as a fresh cabbage, and he incorporates within himself a primordial wisdom and woe. In other hands this novel might have dribbled away in another sentimental exposé of race prejudice, but Mr. Gold makes no gentleman's agreement and rarely capitulates to the expected. It is Harry's problem that concerns him, and the beautiful colored girl, the most unreal character in the book and possibly, *au fond*, a mistake, is only a provocation.

Everyman's quest for certainty is pursued with less stylistic brilliance and originality but with equal good humor in John Wain's picaresque novel, *Born in Captivity*. The echoes of Fielding and Smollett, of *The Way of All Flesh* and *Tono-Bungay*, cannot be stilled, but there is something attractive in a young writer's vision of the twentieth century world as robust and virile as well as menacing. Charles Lumley is trying to escape from his middle-class cage and lose himself in "unmolested security" among the anonymous masses. His experiences in the English jungle include a stint as a window-washer, drug-runner, hospital attendant, chauffeur, bouncer, and gag-man. Nothing decisive results from this war against society except Charles's resolution to remain suspiciously neutral and to take up again with his cynical mistress who is definitely undomesticated and unsafe. Mr. Wain grows less impressive as he approaches seriousness. He is at his best with the zanies and Dickensian grotesques that his hero associates with in the extravagant world beyond the cage.

If Charles Lumley is Everyman as Sophomore, the foe of tedious respectabilities and social smugness, Pierre Javelin, the hero of Jean Malaquais' gruesome fantasy, *The Joker*, is Everyman bedevilled by dehumanized System. He is kin to Kafka's K and Orwell's rebellious individualists, suddenly deprived of his name, his wife, his signature by the City Officials who have spotted his eccen-

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tricity. "You are the seat of an infection," he is told, "the center of an epidemic which has come down to us from barbaric times." And in their efforts to make him "belong", to make him a Citizen content to live in their hygienic warren, they subject him to a series of garish tortures and try to irrigate his unclean privacy.

Returning from a day of canvassing for the National Institute of Beauty and Esthetics, Pierre finds his apartment occupied by a "bald giant with a Russian mustache" and a fat lady. His wife is gone, never again to reappear except in Pierre's erotic recollections or in snatches of frantic telephone conversation. Descending to the foggy canyons of the City, he succeeds after many bootless efforts in finding uneasy refuge in one of the most grisly hotel rooms in literature. In the succession of nightmare days, he is confronted periodically by the official Brain Washer, stinking of chlorine,—a Dr. Babitch. Painfully he tries to penetrate the archives of the hundred-handed, hundred-eyed Bureacracy, seeking to recover his lost identity. Neither Pierre nor the reader can recognize the agents or the victims of the City, but by the time he has fully grasped the meaning of his alleged guilt, he is at last ready to comprehend and to vindicate his commitment to an identity he had only dimly possessed. Only after the rigors of persecution does he qualify for that "race of knights who will not sit up and beg; who, stopped salivating at the sound of a bell, will set fire to the hutments."

Malaquais' parable is told in an almost rollicking style that contrasts powerfully with the terror of his theme. *The Joker* is a highly original treatment of a by now unoriginal situation, a *tour de force* riddled with artifice yet sustained by the intensity of the author's imagination.

All of the novels mentioned in this review deal with the maladies of the world. Some are broadly, others microscopically, observed; but whether the writers are exposing the pitfalls contrived by the self or by society, whether they joke or lament, the prospect they hold up before us is one of fire and violence and recurrent *malaise*. If their novels can be regarded as exercises in literary hypochondria, they are also parables (in Melville's phrase) of "the innate and incurable disorder" of the world.

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SYDNEY GOODSIR SMITH

Robert Burns and *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*

I

In his life of Robert Burns, Hans Hecht[1] says: "Throughout his life, Burns placed his poetic skill in ever greater measure . . . at the service of that one great national idea to which he clung with passionate fervour, *viz.* the wish to leave to posterity, in an ideal and permanent form, a complete collection of the songs of Scotland". In this, Burns was in line with the general tendency of the time. The XVIII century was, among other things, an age of folk-song and ballad collections. In England, the vogue was a sign of that growing sentimentalism towards the "picturesque" and "romantic" middle ages which attained its finest expression poetically in *The Ancient Mariner,* and therefrom, descending through *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *The Lady of Shalott,* contributed to the general weakening and softening of the English poetic genius. In Scotland, the contemporaneous interest in folk-song had a quite other *raison d'être:* it was a symptom of the desire (in many cases probably subconscious but in some perfectly aware) to shore up a national heritage that was rapidly being disintegrated by the increasing anglicization of the country, politically, culturally and socially, following the Parliamentary Union of 1707. This tendency had begun with the Union of the Crowns a century earlier and the consequent removal of the cultural centre, the court, to London. The Parliamentary Union intensified these trends together with the natural protective reaction to them, and spread the effects of both through, first, the middle classes and, by the turn of the century, to the labouring classes as well. The political unrest stimulated by the French Revolution and fostered by the huge circulation of Paine's *Rights of Man,* which, though officially banned, was openly hawked in the cities and even penetrated in a Gaelic translation into the

[1](1936). All the best Lives of Burns are by foreigners: Hecht (German), Angellier (French), Snyder (American) and De Lancey Ferguson (American).

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Highlands, demanded not only parliamentary reform (as was the case in England) but also separation and repeal of the Union. Thomas Muir, the leader of the organized agitation[2], who in 1793 was sentenced to fourteen years transportation to Botany Bay, was in this regard the Scots equivalent of Wolfe Tone in Ireland. Muir's was largely a middle class revolt, but by 1819-20 a working class movement had grown up (calling themselves Radicals to distinguish them from the Whigs), which combined Radicalism with Nationalism.[3] During the Radical Rising of the textile workers in Lanarkshire at this time, street musicians were being arrested for playing "Scots Wha Hae"; one of the revolutionary papers was called *The Scottish Patriot;* and the Men of Strathaven on "their wild mad night-march to the Cathkin Braes" carried a banner inscribed "Scotland Free or a Desart!"[4] This was the political aspect of the (in part) nationalistic emotions bred by the anglicizing Union of a hundred years before. Without the Union there would still have been labour riots but they would not have had the patriotic sclent I have described. There is plenty of evidence in Burns's works of the equivalent literary combination of democracy and nationalism. The whole revival of Scots literature in the XVIII century, of which Burns is the culmination, had its *fons et origo* in resistance to English cultural pressure.

As usual, the poets acted as Pathfinders for the politicians. Allan Ramsay's reprinting of the XV century *Christis Kirk on the Green* (in 1715) and Dunbar, Henryson and other Auld Makars (in *Ever Green,* 1724), like the publisher Thomas Ruddiman's splendid folio of Gawin Douglas's *Aeneid* (1710), were, in this connotation, political acts; as was Ramsay's own turning to Scots for a literary medium after a lapse, apart from folk-song and ballad, of a full century. The political orientation of Ramsay (1686-1758), as of Fergusson after him (1750-1774), was Jacobite, as one might expect from their dates. Ramsay's *Ever Green* and *Tea Table Miscellany* (also 1724) were anthologies, the former of old Scots poets (the Auld Makars) and the latter a mixter-maxter of old and new, Scots and English—a cunning

[2]United Scotsmen and The Friends of the People.

[3]They were the predecessors of Keir Hardie, Cunninghame Graham and Scottish Labour, and since then of John Maclean and the Scottish Workers' Republican Party, and the "Tito-ism" of many Scottish Communists to-day—though not, of course, within the C.P.G.B.

[4]Tom Johnston: *History of the Working Classes in Scotland* (1920).

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editorial move, as was the innocuous and to-day oddly-sounding title. They had a tremendous success, but their interest to us to-day is limited, as the texts were mangled and bowdlerized to suit his polite audience.

II

The most famous of these XVIII century Collections is, of course, Percy's *Reliques* (1765), but the fashion had started right at the beginning of the century with, in Scotland, Watson's *Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems* (1706-11), and, in England, Tom d'Urfey's *Pills to Purge Melancholy* (1719). There were literally scores of such anthologies already in existence, some with music, some without, good, bad and indifferent, when Burns entered the field in 1787.

He had newly arrived in Edinburgh to arrange for a second edition of his *Poems* (Wilson, the Kilmarnock publisher, thought he had exhausted his success with the six hundred copies printed), and at a meeting of the Crochallan Fencibles, one of the many drinking clubs of the time, he met James Johnson, an engraver and music seller, who was in process of producing the first volume of his *Scots Musical Museum*. Burns describes the venture in a letter to his friend Candlish in Glasgow:

> "At present I am fit for nothing. Dissipation and business engross every moment. I am engaged in assisting an honest Scotch Enthusiast, a friend of mine, who is an Engraver, and has taken it into his head to publish a collection of all our songs set to music. . . . This, you will easily guess, is an undertaking (exactly) [*deleted*] to my taste."[5]

And to James Hoy, the Duke of Gordon's Librarian:

> ". . . and your humble servt, to the utmost of his small power, assist(s) in collecting the old poetry, or sometimes to a fine air to make a stanza, when it has no words."[6]

In point of fact, after the first volume had come out, Burns became to all intents and purposes the editor-in-chief. Poor Johnson was an Enthusiast all right, but he was also, unfortunately, practically illiterate. Some of his sentences in letters quite baffle

[5]De Lancey Ferguson. *Letters of R.B.*, I, 179.
[6]Ibid. I, 132.

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comprehension, even as to their general drift. However, the collaboration was to bear fruit. To this collection,[7] and later to George Thomson's more polite and elegant *Select Collection of Original Scotish Airs for the voice* (5 vols., 1793-1826), Burns contributed over three hundred and fifty songs, as well as prefaces, notes, and, in the case of the *Museum,* most of the editorial work. For none of this would he accept a penny of payment. He regarded the work as a patriotic duty.

> "Perhaps you may not find your account, *lucratively,* in this business; but you are a Patriot for the Music of your Country; and I am certain, Posterity will look on themselves as highly indebted to your Publick spirit.—Be not in a hurry; let us go on correctly; and your name shall be immortal."
>
> *RB to Johnson,* 13.11.88.[8]

> "As to any remuneration, you may think my Songs either *above,* or *below* price; for they shall absolutely be the one or the other. . . . In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, &c. would be downright Sodomy of Soul! . . . A proof of each of the songs that I compose or amend, I shall receive as a favor."
>
> *RB to Thomson,* 16.9.92.[9]

The songs fall into three categories: (*a*) Original songs by Burns, written to existing airs. (*b*) Old fragments, sometimes only the refrain or a mere title surviving, which he completed or refurbished. (*c*) Old songs "of an indelicate nature" to which he wrote new words. Many of his best known songs, such as *Auld Lang Syne,* are merely new versions of songs that had been current in different forms for centuries. To this work he devoted the last ten years of his life.

III

It is interesting to note that there are very few *songs* dating from before 1786, the year of the Kilmarnock edition; whereas there are hardly any *poems* of any worth written after that date. Burns's visit to Edinburgh (1786-8) was the watershed of his

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[7] *The Scots Musical Museum* (6 vols., 1787-1803).
[8] Ferg. I, 275.
[9] Ibid. II, 123.

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poetic career. His initial inspiration seems to have been exhausted, by and large, with the publication of his first book. *Tam o' Shanter,* of 1790, is a unique exception. On this point it must be remembered that some of his finest satires were not deemed suitable for publication in the Kilmarnock volume. They appeared later; but in all cases their dates of composition were before 1787. *Death and Dr. Hornbook, Holy Willie's Prayer* and *The Jolly Beggars,* three of his very finest masterpieces, all belong to 1785.

When he arrived in Edinburgh, the lion of the season, he must have realized, if only half-consciously, that he had done as much as he would ever do, at any rate in the satirical vein he had been following. Henderson[10] puts it in a nutshell:

> "Apart from songs—his addiction to which in his later years meant that if he had not been 'made weak by time and fate', he had meanwhile ceased either to 'seek' or 'find' a fuller poetic utterance—his career as poet, which had really extended over little more than a short two years, virtually terminated with the publication of the first Edinburgh Edition in 1787, the only great poem of the last nine years of his life being *Tam o' Shanter,* which he was led to undertake very much by accident."

His stay in Edinburgh, waiting for the publication of his new augmented edition, did nothing to stir any dying poetic fires. He was unhappy about his future, both economic and emotional (or matrimonial). The Edinburgh *literati* dined him and wined him, but did not offer him the sinecure that he was hoping for. He did not enjoy being "a raree show", and although he bore himself well he did not feel at home in "Patrician" company. Also, the habituees of the drawing-rooms, despite their flattery, were essentially and indeed actively (though politely) unsympathetic to his genius, trying to persuade him to give up his "barbaric" Scots ("You ought to deal more sparingly, for the future, in the provincial dialect")[11] and write elegant effusions in English in the manner of Shenstone and Beattie ("You should also . . . become master of the heathen mythology . . . which in itself is charmingly fanciful").[11] In symbolic terms, it was a struggle between Clarinda "the fair Empress of the Poet's Soul", and Jean Armour "the bonnie Lassie, the Lassie I lo'e best". For instance,

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[10]T. F. Henderson (Co-editor with W. E. Henley of the Centenary Burns, 1896-7, the best edition) in *Scottish Vernacular Literature* (1898).

[11]Letter from Dr. John Moore, then in London, 23.5.87. Hecht, *Life of R.B.*

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Henry Mackenzie, the "Man of Feeling" and literary dictator of the capital, in his generous and commendatory review of the Kilmarnock *Poems* in *The Lounger* (Dec. 7. 86), could not forbear from remarking that "even in Scotland, the provincial dialect . . . is now read with a difficulty which greatly damps the pleasure of the reader; in England it cannot be read at all".[12] This, of course, was powerful wishful-thinking on Mackenzie's part, first and last; but it was also typical of the prevailing atmosphere in which the poet moved. He was undeceived, however, and commented on this sort of thing to Mrs. Dunlop (22.3.87):[13]

> "I have the advice of some very judicious friends among the Literati here, but with them I sometimes find it necessary to claim the privilege of thinking for myself."

But even when he escaped from the "Soirees" into his own chosen company, such as that of the Crochallan Fencibles[14] in Daunie Douglas's Tavern, the life of the streets, the oyster cellars and the stews failed to consolate him, even with compensatory material for his Muse. The life of "the old Scots Capital, gay, squalid, drunken, dirty, lettered, venerable",[15] which had been his beloved Fergusson's inspiration, spoke nothing to the farmer from Kyle. He was truly the "rustic Bard", as he liked to call himself. These are typical, but by no means constant, extracts from his letters of this time.

> "I am still undetermined as to the future; and, as usual never think about it."
>
> "I am still 'dark as was Chaos' in respect to Futurity."
>
> "Still I know very well, the novelty of my character has by far the greatest share in the learned and polite notice I have lately got."
>
> "I cannot settle to my mind. . . . If I do not fix, I will go for Jamaica. Should I stay in this unsettled state at home, I would only dissipate my little fortune."
>
> "The stateliness of the Patricians in Edinr, and the servility of my plebeian brethren . . . have nearly put me out of conceit altogether with my species."
>
> "A lingering indisposition has hung about me for some time and has beaten me out of the use of pen and ink."

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[12]Hecht.

[13]Ferguson, I, 80.

[14]So named in satirical allusion to the Buonaparte Volunteer movement.

[15]Henley. *R.B., Life, Genius and Achievement* in *Poetry of R.B.* (Centenary Edn. 1897).

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> "Here am I—that is all I can tell you of that unaccountable Being—myself. What I am doing no mortal can tell; what I am thinking I myself cannot tell; what I am usually saying is not worth telling. The clock is striking one, two, three, four, -, -, -, -, -, -, -, twelve forenoon; and here I sit, in the attic storey, alias the garret."

IV

In this discontented and frustrated state of mind he was the more likely to jump at Johnson's suggestion to collaborate in a collection of songs that would be superior to anything of the kind yet published. Burns had been interested in the subject from his youth, and had already written a few sets of words for old tunes. He took up Johnson's idea with enthusiasm ("I have been absolutely crazed about it." 25.10.87), and from this point on, wherever he happened to be, the Borders, the Highlands, doing his rounds as Exciseman in Galloway, he memorised or jotted down scraps and fragments to be worked up later into presentable shape for the *Museum*.

A large number of these, if not most, would be bawdy; such as were bawled out nightly at the convivial meetings of the Crochallan Fencibles. Maybe, along with perfervid drinking habits, it is a natural reaction from Calvinism, coupled with that aptitude for the ballad form of utterance that has made the Border ballads the best balladry in literature; but, whatever the reason, it is a fact that the composition of obscene verse in Scotland is of such a quality and has so extensive a tradition as almost to merit a chapter to itself in the discussion of any given period of Scottish literature—from Dunbar's *Twa Mairrit Wemen and the Wedow* to the *Ball o' Kirriemuir* of to-day. At the end of the Introduction to his *Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry,* Hugh MacDiarmid regrets that he has been

> "unable . . . to give a fair representation to this most essential and exhilarating and important element of our poetic corpus . . . and to omit it is sadly to emasculate and misrepresent the splendid 'gallus' body of Scottish Poetry."

I hasten to assure English and other readers that Scotland does not claim a monopoly of the high-kilted Muse, but at the same time I

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must point out to any putative contenders for the leerie laureateship that I am talking not of mere skulduggery but of works of art. As Henley or Henderson (I suspect the Englishman Henley) says in their Centenary Edition of Burns (1897):

> "Clandestine literature somewhat similar in kind [XVI & XVII cent.] exists in England, but the product of what we may call the Scots poetical shebeens is vastly preferable in the matter of melody and genius."

That the historical facts of the case should be so realized and actually mentioned in Victorian England is testimony enough, but to hear the same facts announced from Presbyterian Scotland, in 1851—is almost like the voice of God! Nonetheless, in that year Robert Chambers published his edition of the *Life and Works of Burns*, in the course of which he had occasion to touch upon this very subject:

> "With a strange contradiction to the grave and religious character of the Scottish people, they possessed a wonderful quantity of indecorous traditionary verse, not of an inflammatory character, but simply expressive of a profound sense of the ludicrous in connection with the sexual affections. Such things, usually kept from public view, oozed out in merry companies such as Burns loved to frequent."

Apart from the "grave and religious" business, which is obviously soft soap for the readers of *Chambers' Journal* (the same Chambers), his words could not be bettered. I especially like "*oozed* out in merry company". The merry companions of the Crochallan Club seem to have been rather specialists in this amiable department of the Muses' temple, and it was ostensibly for their delight that Burns put together the notebook of eighty-odd "Cloaciniads" which we know to-day as *The Merry Muses of Caledonia.* This notebook has never come to light but there is no doubt that it existed and its contents were often mentioned in the poet's correspondence. On one occasion when "curst necessity" obliged him to ask someone for a loan of £5, an unnamed "miscreant" offered to buy it for £50.[16] Eventually, it seems to have been borrowed from his widow, Jean Armour, and never returned; and in 1800, or thereabouts, four years after his death, a "mean-looking volume" was published in Dumfries under this title—of which almost legendary first edition only a single com-

[16] "Christopher North's" story *per* McNaught.

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plete copy has survived. The title-page runs as follows. It seems incomplete; I take it from McNaught's article in the *Burns Chronicle* of February, 1894.

> THE/MERRY/MUSES/OF/CALEDONIA:/A COLLECTION OF/ FAVOURITE SCOTS SONGS/(*Ancient and Modern*),/SELECTED FOR THE USE OF THE/CROCHALLAN FENCIBLES./[double rule]/ Say, Puritan, can it be wrong,/To dress plain truth in witty song?/What honest Nature says, we should do;/What every lady does . . . or would do./[double rule]/.

Subsequently, throughout the XIX century, the title, *plus* Burns's name which does not appear anywhere in the original edition, was used for a number of editions[17] of sometimes quite irrelevant and vagabond collections of bawdry; until in 1911 the Burns Federation sponsored (with acclamation, I imagine) a reprint, for subscribers only, of the original Dumfries edition with a somewhat hypocritical Introduction (styled "A Vindication of Robert Burns") by Duncan McNaught, heavily disguised as "Vindex".[18] The Vindication part is poppycock, but it does contain a useful though whiles inaccurate examination of the whole bibliographical problem. Mr. McNaught (or Vindex), "after years of hunting", went into the matter with commendable zeal, and his edition, for which we are eternally in his debt, is undoubtedly—unless a miracle should happen—the nearest we shall now get to Burns's own manuscript book.

V

The Contents of this sprightly opusculum, eighty-five compositions in all (with a most generous bonus and *bonne-bouche* in the shape of *The Court of Equity*), consist of (*a*) a large number of old fescennine songs and fragments, some of which are the basis of many of Burns's most famous songs, and (*b*) a smaller number of original works by the Bard. The Debatable Land is fiercely fought over. In the second category are seven songs (Vindex says five) that appear complete (and as many again half-

[17]McNaught lists seven. (Intro. *M.M. of C.* Burns Fed. 1911).

[18]"Heavily disguised" because the Introduction was made up mostly from two signed articles that had already appeared in the *Burns Chronicle*, Nos. III (Feb. 1894) and XX (Jan. 1911).

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complete) in all modern editions of his Collected Works, *viz, The Rantin Dog the Daddy o't, Yestreen I had a Pint o' Wine, O Wha is at my Bower Door?* (O Wha is it but Findlay?), *The Cooper o' Cuddy, The Reel o' Stumpie,* and two songs from *The Jolly Beggars:* "I am a Bard of no Regard" and "I once was a Maid, though I cannot tell when".

Apart from these seven, McNaught admits to only seven more as being by Burns himself. Twenty would be nearer the correct figure in the present writer's opinion, eight of them being accessible in expurgated form in the ordinary editions. But the editor's judgment is distorted by his declared aim to "vindicate" Burns, to demonstrate (if you please)

> "that the association of Burns's name, either as author or editor, with the ribald volumes entitled *The Merry Muses,* is not only an unwarranted mendacity, but one of the grossest outrages ever perpetrated on the memory of a man of genius."

Strong words, Sir! But quibbling. All books bearing the title of *The Merry Muses* were posthumous; naturally Burns could not be their *editor.* Neither is he their *author,* if author of the *whole* contents is meant. Also, he may be referring to the "bad" editions that followed the Dumfries or Crochallan original of 1800. Whatever he may mean by his astonishing outburst, his words are certainly misleading, or ill-composed, or both. Anyway, he protests too much. But, unfortunately for his case, his editorial honesty has overcome both his modesty and his hypocrisy. He provides a few short and not always accurate Notes on the songs which effectively dispose of his bewildering disclaimer. He notes, for instance, of the old song *Andrew and his Cutty Gun,* that Burns himself "describes it as 'the work of a master' ". Also, Burns used it as a model for *Blythe was She,* the chorus of which goes:

Bythe, bythe and merry was she,
Blythe was she but and ben,
Blythe was she by the banks of Earn,
And blythe in Glenturit glen.

In the *Merry Muses* he (who else?) has preserved the original set, with this chorus:

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Blythe, blythe, blythe was she,
Blythe was she but and ben,
And weel she loved it in her nieve,
But better when it slippit in.

Vindex has not chosen a very good pitch. There is more to follow.

To return to our Contents. Excluding the published songs and those one or two by other hands—one of them a minister's!—we find that at least *thirty* (the editor allows fifteen) of the remaining seventy-five pieces of "musty nastiness" (which is just what they are not) were used as models for Burns's "purified" versions contributed to Johnson's *Museum* and Thomson's *Select Airs*. In their published form these retain sometimes as many as three stanzas out of four of the original version, sometimes as little as a single line, generally the refrain. Another *dozen* (the editor admits six) are original ram-stam "Cloaciniads" from the gilravaging Bard himself, and almost all the rest are mentioned by name or quotation in his correspondence. So much for the "grossest outrage", "unwarrantable mendacity", and so on. I have not the space to go into details, but here is an instance revealing Vindex's disingenuousness. Burns writes to his friend Robert Maxwell (20.12.89)[19] enclosing a song which the editorial note in the *Muses* describes, *tout court*, as "An old song". But its context is as follows:

> ". . . I shall betake myself to a subject ever fertile of themes, a Subject, the turtle-feast of the Sons of Satan, and the delicious secret Sugar-plumb of the Babes of Grace; a Subject, sparkling with all the jewels that wit can find in the mines of Genius, and pregnant with all the stores of Learning, from Moses & Confucius to Franklin & Priestly —in short, may it please Your Lordship, I intend to write BAUDY! . . ."

[Out of his own mouth—]

"I'll tell you a tale of a Wife,
And she was a Whig and a Saunt,
She lived a most sanctified life
But whiles she was fashed wi her —t.
Poor woman, she gaed to the Priest,
And to him she made her complaint,

[19]Ferguson. I, 377.

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There's naething that troubles my breast
Sae sair as the sins of my —t."

. . . and the Priest reassures her:

"It's nocht but Beelzebub's art,
And that's the mair sign of a saunt,
He kens that ye're pure at the heart,
So he levels his dart at your —t."

. . . and so on. And the letter ends:

> "You see, Sir, I have fulfilled my promise; I wish you would think of fulfilling yours, and come & see the rest of my collection."

It is not a very good song; I quote it to make a point. We can leave the editor to vindicate himself, now.

VI

Before going any further I must remark that these are *songs*, not *poems*. Without being *sung*, they are only half-things. They are not to be judged even as verse. Burns naturally realised this elementary distinction better than his collaborators. To Thomson (8.11.92), he writes:[20]

> "If you mean, my dear Sir, that all the Songs of your Collection shall be Poetry of the first merit, I am afraid you will find difficulty in the undertaking more than you are aware of.—There is a peculiar rhythmus in many of our airs, and a necessity of adapting syllables to the emphasis, or what I would call, the *feature notes* of the tune, that cramps the Poet, & lays him under almost insuperable difficulties.—For instance, in the air, My wife's a wanton wee thing, if a few lines, *smooth & pretty*, can be adapted to it, it is all you can expect.—The following I made extempore to it; & though, on farther study I might give you something more profound, yet it might not suit the light-horse gallop of the air so well as this *random clink*."

Attribution of the debatable verses without documentary proof is certainly difficult. Many of the songs are found, for instance, generally in fragmentary shape, in David Herd.[21] Burns knew

[20]Ferg. II, 129.

[21]Herd. *Ancient and Modern Scots Songs, Heroic Ballads, etc.*, 1776. Second edn. Also Hans Hecht, *Songs from David Herd's Manuscripts*, 1904.

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Herd personally. But there are variations between Herd's versions and Burns's, apart from the latter's additions. In some cases it may be that he took down a variant from "an oral source" (as yodelling tipplers are called by philologists) or that he himself made changes while copying from Herd. In others the original version has obviously been tidied up, a literary hand has been at work, and a few lines expanded to twice or thrice the length of the original set. I shall quote one of these in a moment. But we cannot even be sure the differences, that seem by their very "roughness" to be the usual local variants found in all folk-song, are not actually Burns's own variations. He was so steeped in folk literature (which is a contradiction in terms, but let it pass) that in imitating it he also imitated this "roughness"—by which I mean (from a literary point of view, which is invalid here) its "bad" or false rhyming or rhythm. On this, see the last letter quoted, or the following note, nine years before, from his *First Commonplace Book* of 1783 (*aet.* 24):

> "There is a certain irregularity in the old Scotch Songs, a redundancy of syllables with respect to that exactness of Accent and measure that the English Poetry requires, but which glides on, most melodiously with the respective tunes to which they are set . . .—This particularly is the case with all those airs which end with a hypermetrical syllable.—There is a degree of wild irregularity . . . and yet, very frequently, nothing, not even *like* rhyme, or sameness of jingle at the ends of the lines. This has made me sometimes imagine that perhaps, it might be possible for a Scotch poet, with a nice judicious ear, to set compositions to many of our most favorite airs . . . independent of rhyme altogether."

A prophetic utterance, at the very outset of his poetic career. *Aet.* 24 is not particularly youthful for most poets, but Burns, in the nature of his circumstances, was a late starter. At this age Robert Fergusson, who was soon to be his great inspirer, had already written his all, and was on his deathbed in the Edinburgh Bedlam. Burns had as yet written only half a dozen poems that in three years' time he would consider good enough for "gude black prent" in the Kilmarnock edition. Five years later, having exhausted the tempestuous short-lived spring of satire that in 1783 had not yet broken surface, he had returned to the ideas sketched in his Commonplace Book. Here is the "Scotch poet with a nice judicious ear", after three years of song-writing, up to all the

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tricks of the trade, master of his instrument and playing with "a certain wild irregularity". The following ballad is indisputably by the Bard, yet it might easily pass for an anonymous product of the folk. (I might mention here that songs occurring in the course of letters to friends, as distinct from enclosures to his publishers, are generally his own compositions.) In October '93 (he had already sent the verses to another friend in '91), he writes[22] to Robert Cleghorn, a great Fencible and lover of ribaldry and the recipient of many of his Bardship's *facetiae*:

> "There is, there must be, some truth in original sin.—My violent propensity to B—dy [*sic*] convinces me of it.—Lack a day! if that species of Composition be the Sin against 'the Haly Ghaist', 'I am the most offending soul alive'.—Mair for taiken, a fine chiel, a hand-wail'd friend and crony o' my ain, gat o'er the lugs in loove wi' a braw, bon[n]ie, fodgel hizzie frae the English side, weel-ken'd i' the brugh of Annan by the name o' Bon[n]ie Mary; & I tauld the tale as follows.—N.B. The chorus is auld—
>
> "COME COWE ME, MINNIE, COME COWE ME—
>
> *When Mary cam o'er the Border,*
> *When Mary cam o'er the Border,*
> *In troth was approachin the —t of a hurchin,*
> *Her —e was in sic a disorder.*
>
> Chorus: *Come cowe me, minnie, come cowe me;*
> *Come cowe me, minnie, come cowe me;*
> *The hair o' my —e is grown into my —t,*
> *And they canna win in for to mowe me.*
>
> *But wanton Wattie cam west on't,*
> *But wanton Wattie cam west on't,*
> *He did it sae tickle, he left nae as meikle*
> *As a spider wad biggit a nest on't.*
>
> *An' was nae Wattie a blinker,*
> *He m-w'd frae the queen to the tinkler;*
> *Then sat down in grief like the Macedon chief,*
> *For want o' mae warlds to conquer.*
>
> *But oh, what a jewel was Mary!*
> *An' what a jewel was Mary,*

[22]Ferguson. II, 213. Two lines of song only.

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Her face it was fine an' her bosom divine,
An' her —t it was theekit wi glory.

"Forgive this *wicked* scrawl.—Thine, in all the sincerity of a brace of honest Port.—R.B."

He falls down with the Macedon chief, some might say, but even that reference is not impossible in XVIII century folk song.

His ostensible purpose in refurbishing the old songs was to preserve them by putting them into polite currency. But now and again, coming across a promising fragment, he made two versions, a polite one for James Johnson, and a not so polite one for the Crochallan worthies. *Had I the Wyte?* (blame) occurs as eight lines in David Herd's MS.

Had I the wyte? had I the wyte?
Had I the wyte? She bad me,
And ay she gied me cheese and bread
To kiss her when she bad me;
For she was stewart in the house
And I was a footman-laddie,
And ay she gied me cheese and bread
To kiss her when she bad me.

For the *Scots Musical Museum* Burns expanded the traditional theme of the lady and her servant to four eight-line stanzas, which are well-known. The second of these runs thus:

Sae craftilie she took me ben,
And bade me make nae clatter;
"For our ramgunshoch glum gudeman
Is out and owre the water:"
Whae'er shall say I wanted grace,
When I did kiss and daut her,
Let him be planted in my place,
Syne say I was the fautor.

The *Merry Muses* version, which the editor again labels as "An old song", begins with lines 1, 2, 5 and 6 of the Herd fragment quoted first, and then continues:

And when I wadna do't again,
A silly cow she ca'd me;

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She straik't my head, and clapt my cheeks,
And lous'd my breeks and bade me.

Could I for shame, could I for shame,
Could I for shame denied her;
Or in the bed was I to blame
She bade me lye beside her:
I p—t six i—s in her wame,
A quarter wadna fly'd her;
For ay the mair I ca'd it hame,
Her ports they grew the wider.

My tartan plaid when it was dark,
Could I refuse to share it;
She lifted up her holland sark
And bade me fin' the gair o't;
Or how could I amang the gerse
But gie her hilt and hair o't;
She clasped her houghs about my —e,
And ay she glowr'd for mair o't.

If that is not the right Burns *élan vital,* it's gey like. It certainly has my vote.

Here, now, is another instance of the goliardic Bard building up on a small fragment, but in this case he forgets about James Johnson and his *Museum* and there is no polite version at all. It is not *indubitably* by Burns, but it is too accomplished for a genuine folk-song—and yet it has all the "irregularity" and energy and humour (which, of course, are Burnsian qualities too) of the typical bothie ballad, plus an indefinable polish-cum-swing that is very much in the Bard's style. Also, it appears in the *Muses* and not in other collections that I am aware of; and, again, Burns in a letter quotes three lines out of the middle of the first stanza, as if they were the beginning of an old song that he was tinkering with. Unfortunately the letter is mutilated. Lastly, I cannot think of anyone else who could have written it. It bears the fetching title of *Nine Inch will Please a Lady.* The letter is a few lines only.[23]

"Ellisland, Friday night—

I sit down to write my friend in not the best plight . . .

[23]Ferguson. I, 295. To Alexander Dalziel (?)

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The carlin clew her wanton tail
Her wanton tail sae ready
I learnt a sang in Annandale . . . [Letter continues]".

Here is the text from the *Merry Muses:*

Come rede me, dame, come tell me, dame,
My dame, come tell me truly,
What length o' graith, when weel ca'd hame
Will ser'e a woman duly?
The carlin clew her wanton tail,
Her wanton tail sae ready;
I learnt a sang in Annandale,
Nine inch will please a lady.

But for a countrie —t like mine,
In sooth we're nae sae gentle;
We'll tak twa thumb-bread to the nine,
And that's a sonsie p—t—e.
O leeze me on my Charlie lad!
I'll ne'er forget my Charlie;
Twa roarin handfu' and a daud,
He nidg't it in fu' rarely.

But weary fa' the laithern doup,
And may it ne'er ken thrivin';
It's no the length that gars me loup,
But it's the double drivin'.
Come nidge me Tam, come nodge me Tam,
Come nidge me o'er the nyvel;
Come loose and lug your batterin' ram,
And thrash him at my gyvel.

VII

McNaught, in the course of his Vindication of the maligned poet, tells us in rhetorical phrase that "from the stock of ribaldry, obscenity and licentiousness, he feasted the world with the fruits of the Hesperides". This is rather *much,* but it is quite astonishing what the Bard could do with a phrase and a tune. The refrain "For aa that and aa that" is a common one in Scottish song. Burns

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used it more than once, but nowhere more effectively than in the democratic hymn *Is there, for honest poverty?* Everyone knows these felicitous and justly famous lines. To revive your memory I quote the third stanza:

Ye see yon birkie, ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, and stares, and a' that;
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a coof for a' that;
For a' that, and a' that,
His ribband, star, and a' that,
The man of independent mind,
He looks and laughs at a' that.

And its perhaps rather over-optimistic ending:

For a' that, and a' that,
It's comin yet, for a' that,
That man to man the warld o'er
Shall brothers be for a' that.

The sentiments may seem platitudinous to us to-day, or utopian; but they were composed in 1795, when the Government's reaction to the agitation for Reform was in full spate. Burns sent the song to Thomson "not for your book, but merely by way of *vive la bagatelle.*" It was published posthumously. Only a year before, the liberal Scottish Nationalist Thomas Muir had sailed on a prison ship to Botany Bay. The French revolutionary armies were threatening invasion and Burns himself had been officially reprimanded for such seditious activities as proposing the toast of "The last verse of the last chapter of the last Book of Kings!" and on another occasion, "May our success in the present war be equal to the justice of our cause!" When Thomas Muir's campaign was at its height in 1792-3, Robert Graham of Fintry, a local magnate and friend of Burns's, had written to him questioning his political opinions. In reply he got the following ballad. I quote two of the eight stanzas.[24] It goes to the tune of "The Campbells are Coming".

When princes & prelates & het-headed zealots
All Europe hae set in a lowe (lowe, lowe)

[24]Printed in Ferguson. II, 250 (6 stanzas).

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The poor man lies down, nor envies a crown,
And contents himself with a mowe.

Chorus: *And why shouldna poor folk mowe, mowe, mowe,*
And why shouldna poor folk mowe;
The great folk hae siller, & houses & lands,
Poor bodies hae naething but mowe.

When Br-nsw-ck's great Prince cam a cruising to Fr-nce
Republican billies to cowe (cowe, cowe),
Bauld Br-nsw-c's great Prince wad hae shawn better sense
At hame wi his Princess to mowe.

To get back to *A Man's a Man For A' That*, the original context[25] of the famous refrain, as preserved in the *Merry Muses*, was naturally not a very serious one—though the sentiments expressed, you will admit, have an equally universal appeal. At the beginning of this section, I quoted the third stanza and the last four lines of the published version; I shall do the same for the unpublished. The difference is very striking, not to say shattering; but it is the same art at work—or play. "Ye see yon birkie ca'd a lord", etc., was transmuted from—

His hairy —ks side and wide,
Hung like a beggar's wallet;
His —k stood like a rollin' pin,
She nicker'd when she saw that.
For a' that and a' that,
And twice as mickle's a' that,
The lassie got a skelpit doup,
But wan the day for a' that.

Then she turned up her h—y —t,
And she bade Donald claw that;
The devil's dizzen Donald drew
And Donald gied her a' that.

Some lady! (see Note[25]). But sometimes in their transposing from the Crochallan Club to the *Musical Museum*, there is not such a

[25]Burns enclosed this in a letter to Thomson, 4.8.95. ". . . [it] was never in print; it is a much superiour song to mine.—I have been told that it was composed by a lady." (Ferg. II, 307).

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great difference of sentiment, though there may be of language. Consider, gentle reader, the moving pathos of *John Anderson, my jo, John.* First, the "purified" version:

John Anderson my jo, John,
When first we were acquent,
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonnie brow was brent;
But now your brow is beld, John,
Your locks are like the snaw;
But blessings on your frosty powe,
John Anderson, my jo.

But does not any "sensible" Man of Feeling shed a tear also at this?

John Anderson my friend, John,
When you did first begin,
You had as good a tail-tree
As ony ither man.
But now 'tis waxen auld, John,
And it waggles to and fro;
And it never stands its lane, now,
John Anderson my jo.

VIII

Of the disputed attributions we can at least say that certain of them are not folk, and are probably by Burns, on internal evidence of style, reference or circumstance. Such an one is *Godly Girzie,* which begins with a typically Burnsian satirico-sentimental scene. Girzie, who is very pious, on her way home at night meets with "a man of sin". Not a bad word has yet been said.

The chiel was wight, the chiel was stark,
He wadna wait to chap nor ca'
And she was faint wi' haly wark,
She hadna pith to say him na.

Then the typically Burnsian, typically Caledonian, sense of the ludicrous takes charge:

But ay she glowr'd up to the moon,
And ay she sighed maist piouslie,

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"I trust my heart's in heaven aboon,
Whare'er your sinfu' p—t—e be."

Even poor Vindex has to admit in this case: "Quite in Burns's style". But he does not say the same for *The Trogger* (pedlar) which has the support of Henley and Henderson in the Centenary Edition. They do not go so far as to print it, though. Here is part of it:

As I cam down by Annan side,
Intending for the Border,
Amang the Scroggie banks and braes
Wha met I but a trogger.

He laid me down upon my back,
I thought he was but jokin',
Till he was — — to the hilts,
O the deevil tak sic troggin!

Bedown the bents o' Bonshaw braes
We took the partin' yokin';
But I've clawed a sairy —t sin' syne,
O the deevil tak sic troggin!

Enclosed with *A Man's a Man* was a pleasant little burlesque of Augustan classicism written for a bet some years before. "I accepted it, & pledged myself to bring in the verdant fields,—the budding flowers,—the crystal streams,—the melody of the groves, —& a love-story into the bargain."

It is called *Ode to Spring*. The first stanza is the best:

When maukin bucks, at early f—s,
In dewy grass are seen, Sir,
And birds, on boughs, take off their m—s,
Amang the leaves sae green, Sir;
Latona's sun looks liquorish on
Dame Nature's grand impètus,
Till his p— go rise, then westward flies
To r—ger Madame Thetis.[26]

This is too obviously written to order, the Muse is not in it. It has charm, but it is not the same Burns of *Had I the Wyte* and *Nine Inch*. The fire of the Kilmarnock satires has died down sadly, the

[26]Printed in full in Ferguson II, 283.

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pace, the wit, the galloping hilariousness, the dance of the word are absent. To end, here is an *echt* folk piece that Burns never used for "purification" purposes—surprisingly, for it has just those qualities of dance that he had once possessed in such measure. It is a Reel tune; hum it as you read, and read it quickly, especially the chorus, which always seems to be the best part of a bothie ballad. I have accented it.

Oúr gudewife held o'er to Fife
Fór to buy a cóal riddle;
Lang or she cam back again,
Támmie gart my táil todle.

Chorus: *Táil todle, táil todle,*
Tammie gart my táil toddle,
But an' ben wi' diddle doddle
Támmie gart my táil todle.

When I'm dead I'm out o' date;
When I'm sick I'm fú' o' trouble;
When I'm weel I stap about,
And Támmie gars my táil todle.

And, for good measure, here is the set in the *Merry Muses* for one of Burns's favourite tunes, "Cauld Kail in Aberdeen".

O gie the lass her fairing, lad,
O gie the lass her fairing;
And something else she'll gie to you
That's wallow worth the wearing.
Syne coup her o'er among the creels
When ye hae ta'en your brandy,
The mair you bang, the less she squeals—
So hey for houghmagandie!

Then gie the lass her fairing, lad,
O gie the lass her fairing,
And she'll gie you a h—y thing
And of it be not sparing;
Lay her o'er amang the creels
And bar the door wi' baith your heels,
The mair she gets, the less she squeals—
So hey for houghmagandie!

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"Any association of Burns's name, either as author or editor . . . unwarranted mendacity . . . one of the grossest outrages ever perpetrated . . . memory of a man of genius . . ." (Vindex).

> "I think I once mentioned something to you of a Collection of Scots Songs I have for some years been making; I send you a perusal of what I have gathered. I could not conveniently spare them above five or six days, and five or six glances of them will probably more than suffice you.[27] . . . There is not another copy of the Collection in the world; and I should be sorry that any unfortunate negligence should deprive me of what has cost me a good deal of pains." (R.B. to John M'Murdo. 1792)[28]
>
> ". . . They may make you laugh a little, which, on the whole, is no bad ways of spending one's precious hours and still more precious breath." (To Jas Hoy, 6.11.87)[29]

Yes, Robert Chambers was right. They are not "inflammatory"; just good hearty belly-laughs. There seems little reason why they should not be published again. One cannot know Burns properly without them.

NOTE.—The text of all letters (except the penultimate one quoted) is taken from De Lancey Ferguson's edition, Oxford, 1931. The text of the songs is mostly taken from Duncan McNaught's 1911 edition of the *Merry Muses* published privately by the Burns Federation. The exceptions are where the songs are also printed in Ferguson's *Letters of R.B.* which were collated with the original MSS. In these few latter cases comparison reveals that considerable corruption (generally towards anglicization) has taken place—either in the original Dumfries edition or in McNaught's reprint. S.G.S.

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[27]Ferg. II, 22. After "suffice you", Currie in his 1800 edition of Burns had interpolated "A very few of them are my own." This text was followed by all subsequent editors, including Ferguson. The original letter contains no such phrase. See Ferguson in *Burns Chronicle*, 1953. 3rd series, vol. II.

[28]Ferg., *Burns Chron.* 1953.

[29]Ferg. I, 136.

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WILLIAM STAFFORD

One Home

Mine was a Midwest home—you can keep your world.
Plain black hats rode the thoughts that made our code.
We sang hymns in the house; the roof was near God.

The light bulb that hung in the pantry made a wan light,
but we could read by it the names of preserves—
outside, the buffalo grass, and the wind in the night.

A wildcat sprang at Grandpa on the Fourth of July
when he was cutting plum bushes for fuel,
before Indians pulled the West over the edge of the sky.

To anyone who looked at us we said, "My friend";
liking the cut of a thought, we could say "Hello".
(But plain black hats rode the thoughts that made our code.)

The sun was over our town; it was like a blade.
Kicking cottonwood leaves we ran toward storms.
Wherever we looked the land would hold us up.

Acquaintance

Because our world hardened
while a wind was blowing
mountains hold a grim expression
and all the birds are crying.

I search in such terrain,
face flint all the way,
alert for the unreal
or the real gone astray.

And you I greet, gargoyles—
untrue, assuming no truth,
never expecting my compass,
built from the first on grief.

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Walking West

Anyone with quiet pace who
walks a gray road in the West
may hear a badger underground where
in deep flint another time is

Caught by flint and held forever,
the quiet pace of God stopped still.
Anyone who listens walks on
time that dogs him single file

To mountains that are far from people,
the face of the land gone gray like flint.
Badgers dig their little lives there,
quiet-paced the land lies gaunt,

The railroad dies by a yellow old depot,
town falls away toward a muddy creek.
Badger-gray the sod goes under
a river of wind, a hawk on a stick.

In the Oregon Country

From old Fort Walla Walla and the Klickitats
to Umpqua near Port Orford, stinking fish tribes
massacred our founders, the thieving Whites.

Chief Rotten Belly slew them at a feast;
Kamiakin riled the Snakes and Yakimas;
all spurted arrows through the Cascades west.

Those tribes became debris on their own lands:
Captain Jack's wide face above the rope,
his Modoc women dead with twitching hands.

The last and the most splendid, Nez Percé
Chief Joseph, fluttering eagles through Idaho,
dashed his pony-killing getaway.

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They got him. Repeating rifles bored at his head
and in one fell look Chief Joseph saw the game
out of that spiral mirror all explode.

Back of the Northwest map their country goes,
mountains yielding and hiding, fold on fold,
gorged with yew trees that were good for bows.

The Gun of Billy the Kid

When they factoried Billy's gun
and threaded it on that string
that ended in far hearts,
the quitting bell rang.

From a gunshop with walls honeycombed
mild as church sunlight
with promises for the soul
the gun went out to hunt.

That line the gun barrel followed
wavering for years then trued
went strangely devious on Sunday,
tugging at its pool of blood.

Nosing miles of promise
the front sight could find its game
and rest at point with no doubt—
this the round world confirms,

But over the wall of the world
there spills each lonely soul,
and snapping a gun won't help
the journey we all have to go:

In the iron of every day
stars can come through the sky,
and we can turn on the light
and be saved before we die.

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Now I once handled firearms
but I handed them back again,
being a pacifist—
then why do I sing this song?

Because, of all the lost,
only the sign of the cross
can bring a killer home,
and Billy the Kid was one,

And Smith and Wesson, who helped,
and singers and story-tellers,
kids in the vacant lots—
all careless hearty fellows.

I follow this, light and strong—
this belief men treat like smoke deer—
through a world like our Southwest,
with its monotony, distance, and power.

Billy the Kid was game,
but his game was murder in life:
to know, to see, to save—
for these the good men strive.

And I say my story is true
and is about God and is well;
I tell it the way it came to me,
as one of the truths to tell.

Spaced Around

Color goes limpid all over
pulling threads in a fable fabric,
yellow as any string and purple as drumming.

Sunday women fill their own space
pale and faint through a narrow mesh,
overcome by coloring but in the right army.

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And birds are sent, screaming blue
or in the afternoon following butterflies
through some pattern color already predicted.

Or strange and slow paths of the lightning
wink through the whole sky, even when
daylight or the moon denies any trace there.

The whole world quivers the same way,
riddled, worn through, doomed with trails
that turn white after the colors of passing.

A Ritual to Read to Each Other

If you don't know the kind of person I am
and I don't know the kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.

For there is many a small betrayal in the mind,
a shrug that lets the fragile sequence break
sending with shouts the horrible errors of childhood
storming out to play through the broken dyke.

And as elephants parade holding each elephant's tail,
but if one wanders the circus won't find the park,
I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty
to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.

And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,
a remote important region in all who talk:
though we could fool each other, we should consider—
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.

For it is important that awake people be awake,
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give—yes or no, or maybe—
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

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In the Deep Channel

Setting a trotline after sundown
if we went far enough away in the night
sometimes up out of deep water
would come a secret-headed channel cat,

Eyes that were still eyes in the rush of darkness,
flowing feelers noncommittal and black,
and hidden in the fins those rasping bone daggers,
with one spiking upward on its back.

We would come at daylight and find the line sag,
the fishbelly gleam and the rush on the tether:
to feel the swerve and the deep current
which tugged at the tree roots below the river.

The Fish Counter at Bonneville

Downstream they have killed the river and built a dam;
by that power they wire to here a light:
a turbine strides high poles to spit its flame
at this flume going down. A spot glows white
where an old man looks on at the ghosts of the game
in the flickering twilight—deep dumb shapes that glide.
So many Chinook souls, so many Silverside.

Vacation

One scene as I bow to pour her coffee:—

Three Indians in the scouring drouth
huddle at a grave scooped in the gravel,
lean to the wind as our train goes by.
Someone is gone.
There is dust on everything in Nevada.

I pour the cream.

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IRVING SINGER

The World of George Santayana

With the posthumous publication of *My Host the World,* Volume III of *Persons and Places,* George Santayana's autobiography comes to an end. The book was completed ten years before his death and so actually antedates *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels* and *Dominations and Powers,* but Santayana's last decade was not an eventful one and might well be omitted from the history of his experiences with persons and places. Living in a single room of the sanatorium run by the English Blue Nuns at the Church of San Stefano in Rome, Santayana spent his last years in greater seclusion than before, allowing himself even fewer contacts with people and even fewer opportunities for direct observation. The word "even" is significant here because, as the autobiography shows, Santayana never sought a wide range of experience with either persons or places. In a long life, the last forty years of which were blessed with financial and occupational freedom, Santayana met and knew many individuals and lived in or visited several countries; but the individuals were generally academic acquaintances or school friends or relatives, and in none of the countries did Santayana make an attempt to understand the petty but inescapable problems of ordinary people pursuing the everyday activities of political, social, and economic routine. Like Socrates, Santayana was, and wanted to be, a gadfly; but unlike Socrates, he refused to become a gadabout: his place was in the enclosed garden, not the open agora.

Santayana was not possessive: he had no desire to accumulate an enormous wealth of indiscriminate experience. Like Plato, Pater, Schopenhauer, and Spinoza (a strange assortment no doubt, but all of them greatly influenced him) Santayana cultivated not experience but the fruit of experience, not idiosyncrasies of life but recurrent patterns of existence. He wished, above all, to combine the inventiveness of a poet with the integrity of a philosopher. For this kind of occupation he did not need the agora;

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indeed, the flora and fauna that he would find there could only confuse and arrest. At the same time, however, Santayana was neither bigoted nor absolutistic. He knew that his imagination, if not his actual experience, must be stocked, like Noah's ark, with something of each kind. Life was multifarious, and he had no intention, in his re-creation of it, to squeeze everything into one constraining category. It was from the unity of his own personality, and in terms of his own imaginative interests, that he viewed the things of this world; but he realized that all things, from their own point of view, had inherent varieties that could not be reduced away. "The full-grown human soul should respect all traditions and understand all passions; at the same time it should possess and embody a particular culture, without any unmanly relaxation or mystical neutrality." Out of these two strands the autobiography is woven: the detached sympathy with all persons and places contrasting, sometimes stridently, with the necessity to live as a particular person in a particular place.

As far as Santayana's philosophic ideas are concerned, the autobiography adds little that is new. Instead, it places his philosophy in a vital context and indicates the underlying problems that motivate so much of his thinking. An author's world outlook is as much a function of the questions that he asks of the world as it is of the answers he happens to attain. The answers can be neatly presented in a technical work, such as *Realms of Being* or *Scepticism and Animal Faith;* but the adequate exposition of fundamental questions requires something like *The Last Puritan* or the Platonizing sonnets or the *Soliloquies* or, specifically, this autobiography.

From the autobiography it becomes wholly clear that the problems that were personally most significant to Santayana were neither the problems of action nor of feeling, but rather of belief. Problems of action are concerned with man's practical relations to his environment; they spring from the inescapable necessity of making moral choices and defensible decisions. Those who, like Hamlet, are unable to act in a consecutive and meaningful manner tend to interpret life's problems in terms of a search for purposive behavior and freedom of the will. It is in these terms that most American authors have seen the world. Writers as different as Henry James and Theodore Dreiser portray indi-

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viduals who are happy or fulfilled only to the extent that they are able to *do* something, to impose whatever talents and sensitivities they may have upon an environment that demands decisiveness and moral rigor. And the mainstream of pragmatism, behaviorism, and operationalism stems from a similar source. Problems of feeling are those that derive from the need to grow in sensitivity and the ability to commune directly with things and people other than oneself. This development of spontaneous understanding and appreciation, of intuition in short, poses the problem for writers as remote as Augustine, on the one hand, and Pascal, Bergson, and Proust on the other.

To the thinking of Santayana, however, neither of these kinds of problem was pre-eminent. He tended to envisage freedom less as the ability to act than as the ability *not* to act. He did not recognize any supreme achievement in the mere effort to change the world; and he presupposed that the good life depended upon moral resolution—for him there was no burning problem here. Likewise, he took for granted the needed ability to feel properly, to discriminate appreciatively and spontaneously. From one end of the autobiography to the other, one does not get the impression that Santayana's powers of sensitive awareness developed greatly. Throughout his life they seem to have remained constant: refined and impeccable, no doubt, but static, not dynamic. One does not sense that he had anything like the growth of feeling which is recorded in *The Remembrance of Things Past* or the *Pensées*.

To say all this is, however, only to indicate that questions about feeling and action were, for Santayana, less important than questions about belief. If he had "a white marble mind", as William James said of him, this was true only with respect to the problems that touched him more remotely. For him, the most vital problems of life centered about man's need for seeking the truth and holding fast to it regardless of the consequences to himself or others. Unlike William James, Santayana wished to articulate beliefs that were warranted, not because they worked or served as a personal convenience, but simply because, in some ultimate and irreducible sense, they were *true*. The need to act and to feel Santayana considered secondary to the need to distinguish appearance from reality and sophistry from logic. In many important ways Santayana's philosophy closely resembled both pragmatism

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and intuitionism, but always in the context of a more pervasive scholasticism and rationalism. Indeed, it was because Santayana loved the truth as something sacrosanct and independent that he insisted upon the scepticism to which his thinking led him. Pragmatism shocked and disgusted him: although its program was based on a scepticism as extreme as his, pragmatism slurred over this melancholy part of philosophy for fear of undermining an opportunism that Santayana considered both facile and futile. He felt that pragmatism was too quick to get people doing something for it to be wholly honest. It was willing to wink complacently over the inveterate limitations of the human situation; Santayana wanted to take a long look at the pettiness of man before he came round to the need for action, science, and morality. Intuitionism, on the other hand, lacked the interest in reflection that pragmatism at least retained. Intuitionism besotted itself with faith in impure emotions, absurdly expecting feeling to succeed where thought had failed. Santayana was willing to tolerate romantic excursions, but he denied that they were likely to lead to the truth.

In working out his problem of belief, Santayana distinguished between two aspects of the human mind: reason and the spirit. The former was part of the animal organism that acted and felt and was located in space and time—the "psyche", as Santayana called it. Reason was responsible for the intelligent adaptation of the psyche to its environment: it was practical and efficacious and sought, above all, to reconcile man's divergent impulses within a working harmony. The spirit, however, was an outsider to the practical nature of man. It was specifically intellectual and immaterial, a disinterested observer that could as easily sympathize with entities remote in space and time as with those that were near. In fact, it could refuse to serve the needs of the very psyche from which it sprang, and even when it cooperated it did so only as a spectator, not as an agent. Spirit was the capacity to intuit the *essences* of things—their characters, defining attributes, or "whatness": the qualitative aspect of experience in its immediacy; but spirit was entirely unable to hold commerce with the *substance* of things—their brute presentness, factuality or "thatness": the dynamic aspect of a material world in flux. As something immaterial, spirit was inevitably doomed, like Cassandra or Tiresias,

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to see all yet act on nothing. But whereas reason enabled an organism to survive and be happy, the spirit caused it to be consciously and dispassionately aware of what was true, good, and beautiful. Without reason one could not live well; but without the spirit one could not attain clarity, insight, or ultimate integrity—without it one could not *believe* properly.

What then is the problem of belief for Santayana, and how is it central to all his thinking? At the very end of *My Host the World,* Santayana speaks of "the double conflict, the social opposition and the moral agony, that spirit suffers by being incarnate." Still, he goes on to say, "if it were not incarnate it could not be individual, with a situation in space and time, a language and special perspective over nature and history: indeed, if not incarnate spirit could not *exist* at all. . . . [It is] the fate of all spirit to live in a special body and a special age, and yet, for its vocation and proper life, to be addressed from that center to all life and all being." From this we may easily envisage the radical dilemma in which Santayana found himself. We can believe properly, and as a result act and feel properly, only when the spirit is free to wander. But the spirit cannot exist without the prison-like shelter of some particular body, some particular set of habits, some particular culture or tradition. How then can the spirit ever be free, how can we believe with any assurance that we are approximating the truth, how in other words can the "full-grown human soul" properly respect all traditions at the same time as it embodies a specific culture?

In his search for an answer to these questions, Santayana begins as a sceptic and ends as a believer. On the one hand, he denies that we can avoid error except by restraining all interpretation of the world as it impinges upon us. One way of living in the spirit would be to strip our consciousness to the sheer intuition of sensory essences, eliminating the reflective aspect which makes knowledge possible. We would then encounter reality without actually knowing anything about it, much as an idiot might. On the other hand, scepticism is for Santayana mainly a "heuristic pose"; and he effectively employs it as a mid-station on the way to faith. Far from being limited to the vacuous certitudes of sensation, the life of spirit that he ultimately recommends encompasses the rich experience of an individual who lives in the ma-

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terial world and yet is able to go beyond his mundane impulses and duties. To do this is to see things in the round, *sub specie aeternitatis*, in terms of their unique quality as well as their history in the world. This is the office of the saint, who lives as an animal organism but lives with the contemplative detachment that enables him to attain the truth and to rise above his animality.

In advocating this kind of saintliness, Santayana does not wish to identify his view with that of traditional religion. The churchly saints have too often been ascetics; and all supernatural doctrines that claim to be literal truth Santayana rejected as either superstition or fallacious physics. Nevertheless, although he considered the existence of God improbable, Santayana was not just an atheist: he was, as D. C. Williams has put it, a *Catholic* atheist. Throughout his life Santayana retained a strong attachment to Catholicism as the specific culture within which he had matured and to which, willy nilly, he was emotionally committed. He would no sooner renounce Catholicism than he would renounce his parents or the animal side of his nature. But just as his parents' views were not his views, and just as the search for salvation required the subordination of one's animal nature, so too did he refuse to distort his naturalistic beliefs for the sake of the Catholic feelings that he had grown up with. When my wife and I visited Santayana in August, 1950, he told us how, upon entering San Stefano, he had informed the authorities that he was a non-practising Catholic. And then he continued: "They sent me all kinds of priests to try to convert me, and I argued with them. They all went away baffled: the old professor knew more about it than they did. But the Mother Superior and some of the nuns are nice, and I let them leave a Bible in my room. Now I'm worried that at the end I may have a protracted illness, or be in a coma for some time, and they'll be standing around waiting for a last minute conversion. It can be awfully embarrassing."

The struggle between Catholicism and naturalism that disturbed the youthful Santayana, and which was recorded and dramatized in his early sonnets, closely paralleled the conflict between religion and science that troubled most reflective persons of the time. In this respect, as in so many others, Santayana was a representative child of the nineteenth century. Still, not everyone resolved the conflict in the way that he did. T. S. Eliot, a

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student of Santayana's at Harvard, offers an interesting example of one who did not. Like Santayana, Eliot considered the subordination of feelings to beliefs to be the main problem of life; but whereas Santayana's feelings were religious and his beliefs naturalistic, Eliot's feelings were naturalistic or sceptical and his beliefs religious. The main thoroughfare of Eliot's writing is one long consecration to his Christian beliefs, and the recording of one long attempt to subdue whatever sentiments or emotions might distract him from those beliefs. Even with respect to religious feelings, Eliot agreed with T. E. Hulme when he said that one ought not to "put up with the dogma for the sake of the sentiment, but . . . possibly swallow the sentiment for the sake of the dogma."[1]

Unlike Eliot and Hulme, Santayana believed that the dogmas of all supernatural religions could be justified only as imaginative expressions of human aspiration. For him religion was, and of a right ought to be, nothing more than poetry supervening upon life. As a kind of aesthetic metaphysics or myth-making, it helped to cultivate the most elevated feelings and provided vital reassurance that science could not give. But, according to Santayana, religion had no authority to contradict science, for in its valid function religion could only depict ideal, and non-existent, essences. On the one hand, science described the realm of material substance, which includes all existence but no perfection. On the other hand, religion portrayed essences of perfection, which might delight and even give us something to live for, but which did not actually exist. It was to this duality that William James referred when he ambiguously called Santayana's philosophy a "perfection of rottenness".

The transition from orthodox Catholicism to a more or less orthodox naturalism was not without pain for the young Santayana. It was a period of despair and disillusion not basically different from the experience of Joyce's character Stephen Daedalus, who also felt the conflict between naturalistic beliefs and Catholic feelings and who also refused to subordinate the

[1]Eliot's main problem being similar to Santayana's, it would be interesting to know just how the teacher influenced the student. In other matters, Santayana surely had some effect upon Eliot: the latter's doctrine of the "objective correlative", for instance, is a virtual restatement of Santayana's views about "correlative objects" which had appeared in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (p. 265) almost twenty years earlier.

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former to the latter. "I was quite sure," Santayana writes about this stage of his development, "that life was not worth living; for if religion was false everything was worthless, and almost everything, if religion was true. . . . I saw the . . . alternative between Catholicism and complete disillusion; but I was never afraid of disillusion, and I have chosen it."

Together with this disillusionment came a sense of isolation, a feeling of disharmony between his preferences and the demands of the environment in which he had been cast by chance. Like many another, Santayana felt the oppression of living in a money-mad society. The nineteenth century was not only a period in which religion and science parted company, at least temporarily, but also one in which the artist or lover of life felt himself increasingly alienated from the rest of a commercialized society. The result was a desiccated aestheticism and a progressive withdrawal by the artists such that society became even more oppressively philistine. As a young man, Santayana was too formalistic and precise to be considered bohemian, but he *was* a poet and he did hold some form of suspicious Platonism and he did flourish a warm and ironic latinity in the face of cold and moralistic New Englandry. When Santayana was in line for promotion to assistant professor at Harvard, President Charles W. Eliot had his misgivings: "The withdrawn, contemplative man who takes no part in the everyday work of the institution, or of the world, seems to me a person of very uncertain value. He does not dig ditches, or lay bricks, or write school-books, his product is not of the ordinary useful, though humble, kind. What will it be? It may be something of the highest utility; but, on the other hand, it may be something futile, or even harmful because unnatural and untimely." After William James strongly urged the appointment, President Eliot relented, but he was all too right in thinking that for Santayana the practical routine of teaching at Harvard, or anywhere else, was not the life supreme. In his autobiography Santayana refers to this period as "somnambulistic".

But despair and disillusion did not last. They were only the transitional means by which Santayana shook off his conventional "once-born" state in order to return, with greater wisdom, to the task of disintoxicating spirit from the material interests of the organism. Detachment of this sort was not a separation from life,

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but rather a technique by which spirit could assert its dominance over the feelings and actions of the body to which it was inevitably joined. One renounced the world in order to get it back in greater purity: and in particular, the purity of fraternal friendship, untrammeled imagination, and formulated truth. This is what Santayana means when he says that the passion of sublimated love, far from being bloodless, is rather "essentially the spiritual flame of a carnal fire that has turned all its fuel into light".

Human freedom, then, depended upon the reconciliation of body and soul, psyche and spirit, and not the total renunciation of either. It is true that much of Santayana's later writing was devoted to the description of what sheer spirituality—the life of a wholly independent spirit—would be like. But he always insisted that spirituality was only one aspect of human nature, only one of the factors that would have to contribute to liberation. The mystics sought to eliminate everything other than spirituality, but Santayana by no means implied that their life was the best or only good one, and he never suggested that it was what he himself wished to attain.

All the same, misinterpretation of Santayana's later work has led many philosophers, particularly his pragmatist critics in America, to conclude that Santayana's ethical theory changed as he grew older. This is how they describe the change: As a young man, Santayana devoted all of his five volume work *The Life of Reason* to the thesis that the good life could be attained only through the harmonization of the various impulses that naturally conflict within the human animal. A decision was then considered morally sound if it helped to reconcile all or most of one's interests, and harmonization of this sort was thought to require the use of reason or intelligence. In other words, Santayana's earlier ethical theory utilized a standard of intelligence for the determination of what would be an "objectively moral act" under specified circumstances—that is, an act that might justifiably be recommended for all persons similarly situated. In his later theory, however, Santayana renounced the ideal of intelligence for one that advocates an interest in contemplated essences, an interest that is accepted and recommended *not* because it harmonizes best with other interests but merely because it is the interest of spirituality.

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As logicians, Santayana's critics complain that he often contradicted himself since he failed to recognize the shift in his thinking; and as pragmatists, they find his later standard of ethics distinctly inferior to his former one.

Actually, Santayana's later writings do not include a shift in theory, although they certainly do indicate a "change of climate", as he puts it. However confusing his language may have been, Santayana never really considered either rationality or spirituality to be *the* objective moral standard. He called himself a "moral relativist", by which he meant, among other things, that neither the life of reason nor the life of independent spirit could justifiably be recommended for all persons in all situations. His earlier defense of the life of reason and his later concern for the contemplation of essence should, I think, be taken more as expressions of his own momentary interests than as theoretical or doctrinal positions in ethics. As a young man, Santayana sided with the rational world and judged spirituality, like everything else, in terms of its consequences. His judgment was severe, as may be seen from his treatment of mysticism. Also, he was confident that most worldly impulses could be harmonized, and a stable political order imposed upon them. As an older man, Santayana shed that illusion: he came to realize that a life of reason was a precarious achievement and its victories often slight and dubious. His renewed interest in spirit, as an indispensable part of human nature, deepened his sympathy with the contemplative life and even mysticism. He could now imagine the arguments of one who stood wholly against the world and chose complete renunciation rather than harmonization. He learned to appreciate the message of the Indians as well as that of the Greeks, although he himself still preferred the latter: "I frankly cleave to the Greeks and not to the Indians, and I aspire to be a rational animal rather than a pure spirit."

We may say, then, that Santayana more or less retained his preference for the life of reason. But he never suggested that his preferences, whatever they might be, were to serve as the bases of an objective ethical code. When he defends the life of reason, as a young man, or takes the part of someone who aspires to be a pure spirit, in his later years, he is merely presenting the implications of a possible way of life. He does not tell the reader which

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one *he* ought to follow, and at times he specifically denies that "ought" can be used in this fashion at all.

Still, this does not prevent Santayana from believing in an objective moral standard on another and more revealing level. For he says that we ought to take our stand, whether it be with the rational world or against it, in the light of what we *are,* as distinct from what we *think* we are. Concerning the antagonism between a master-passion (which spirituality, the renunciation of all passion, may itself paradoxically become) and the interest in harmony or reason, he says: "The ethics of this conflict are the same as in other conflicts: to know oneself, and to impose on oneself or on others only the sacrifices requisite to bring one's chosen life to perfection."

In the final analysis, therefore, it would appear that Santayana does believe in an objective standard of moral value and that he is not, to this extent, a moral relativist. He ordains that our preferences are ethically justifiable only if they result from knowledge of what we really are and what we really want. And this, on its own level, virtually reinstates the ideal of a life of reason; for we cannot, in Santayana's philosophy, have knowledge without intelligence. Consequently, I would further disagree with Santayana's pragmatist critics who complain that his later philosophy relinquishes the objective standard of intelligence. In the only sense in which Santayana consistently maintained that standard as a young man he also did as an old man. Like the pragmatists themselves, he was, both early and late, a relativist insofar as he denied that one could determine, in advance, which way of life is best for some particular individual. But he accepted intelligence as an objective and moral standard inasmuch as he maintained that a valid decision could not be made without a rational insight into the individual's nature. Santayana believed, as did the pragmatists, that the good life for some particular person is that life which harmonizes his various interests and passions in accordance with his "real nature".

How we are to determine what an individual's "real nature" is Santayana does not say; and in this respect his philosophy is surely insufficient for the needs of practical decision-making. He simply expects each person to settle the matter for himself; but this, as he admits, avoids the issue instead of solving it. Nevertheless, in

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The Last Puritan, his only novel, Santayana gives us something that is perhaps better than a decision-procedure for determining what one's "real nature" is. He there presents a detailed portrait of two young men: each of whom eventually gains insight into his real nature, although only one is able to live successfully according to it.

Oliver Alden, "the last puritan", strives for spiritual emancipation without realizing, until it is too late, that he is doing so. His development is warped and frustrated by his puritanical surroundings and by the fact that the world is never hospitable to those who seek perfection. Like Santayana himself, Oliver is troubled by the problem of belief, not of action or feeling. Until the end he retains his rigorous and puritanical ability to act, and the ability to refine his feelings was of little importance to him. What mattered most for Oliver was the discovery of some concept or ideal that was *worth* acting for, something that his intellect could accept as a valid program for life. He is driven by a desire for the truth, and he finally receives his crowning epiphany when he realizes that he has deluded himself in his relations to the men and women he has loved: "I was not seeing the reality in them at all, but only an image, only a mirage, of my own aspiration." In the Prologue, Santayana sums up Oliver's "secret" as something "common enough, if you like, and even universal, since it was simply the tragedy of the spirit when it's not content to understand but wishes to govern." If only Oliver had been content to understand, he might have seen the reality both in his friends and in the world. As it is, he fails to attain a lasting salvation because he fails to solve the problem of belief. On puritan grounds he finally convinces himself that it is wrong to be a puritan; but he cannot think his way through to a defensible alternative.

If Oliver represents the lonely and pathetic spirit doomed to misery in a world devoted to action, Mario Van der Weyer, his cousin, portrays the harmony of natural impulses and the jubilant life of reason. Mario, who never worries about life, is able to think, act, and feel in a degree sufficient to assure his happiness. He just naturally succeeds in everything he undertakes. He is cultivated, witty, intelligent, considerate, and even kind, but he has little of the spirituality that characterizes Oliver, and none of

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his puritanism. Mario is as latin as Oliver is nordic, as Catholic as Oliver is Protestant. His is a sunny daylight, not the dark night of the soul. Unlike Oliver, he fulfills his true nature.

In presenting these two contrasting portraits, Santayana is not merely personifying the life of spirit and the life of reason. He is also, as he indicates in the Preface, elaborating different aspects within his own nature, different tensions that had to be reconciled in order for him, or anyone like him, to lead a good life. By means of illustration, if not by argument or description, he is pointing to that element of personality with which all moral deliberation must concern itself. He is depicting what his own real nature is like, and how it had to struggle with the environment in order to attain integrity.

What Santayana means by "real nature" may also be seen from his conception of the self. And it is at this point that the ethics and politics of the pragmatists do part company with Santayana's. From the differences between Santayana and the pragmatists about the nature of the self, together with the fact that Santayana subordinates problems of action, springs all their mutual distrust, mistaken criticism, and inability to appreciate one another.

The differences between the two conceptions of the self can be illustrated as follows:

Figure A

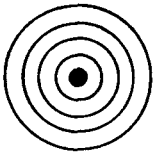

Figure B

Figure A represents the self as a core or kernel with concentric circles around it. The circles are the experiences of the self, none of which touch it but all of which enclose it and make it appear differently from the outside. Figure B represents the self as a spiral whose structure, contours, and direction themselves include interaction with the environment. As a result, there is nothing in the spiral to allow any viable distinction between the self and its experience.

According to the kernel theory of personality, the self is "really" separate from its experience. The experience that im-

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pinges upon a person does change him in the sense of adding new attributes to his character and making him seem different. But the kernel of his being never changes, and it is with this that his real nature is to be identified. This core may be hard to define, but it amounts to what the individual is "in his heart", all the incrustations of his actual development being outer layers that could in principle be stripped off. Consequently, the interest that one does, or ought, to take in the environment is only such as to draw out what one really is anyhow. In an unhappy life, the outer layers are opaque to the kernel, they smother and distort it. In a fulfilled life, on the other hand, the kernel determines what the concentric circles of experience are to be. To attain salvation one must recognize one's own kernel and live according to its particular dimensions. Other persons, however intimate, can never know the kernel of one's being; and it is this realization which leads Pascal, for instance, to despair of merely human love: "What is the Ego? . . . does he who loves someone on account of beauty really love the person? No; for the small-pox, which will kill beauty without killing the person, will cause him to love her no more. And if one loves me for my judgment, memory, he does not love *me,* for I can lose these qualities without losing myself. Where, then, is this Ego, if it be neither in the body nor in the soul? And how love the body or the soul, except for these qualities which do not constitute *me,* since they are perishable? For it is impossible and would be unjust to love the soul of a person in the abstract. . . . We never, then, love a person, but only qualities."

The spiral theory denies that there is any inner kernel to be identified with one's real nature. At any moment an individual is merely the sum total of his experiences, the spiral at a particular point and as it leads on to further convolutions. There is here no break between the self and its experience, for the experience constitutes the self, and in its totality the self is only a series of past, present, and future experiences. By phrases like "real nature" or "true self", etc., this theory would refer merely to the happy or self-sustaining condition of an organism. In order to know whether an individual is attaining his real nature, one would not look for integrity with an underlying core of personality, but rather for a spiral that harmoniously continues to wend its way through the universe. Madame Merle, in Henry James's *The*

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Portrait of a Lady, presents this view as follows: "There's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our 'self'? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us—and then it flows back again. I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for *things!* One's self—for other people—is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps—these things are all expressive."

Neither Santayana nor pragmatists like John Dewey and William James consistently hold to either of these theories of human personality. But whereas the pragmatists strongly emphasize the spiral theory, Santayana leans most heavily on the kernel theory. At the hard inner core he would not place the entire self, but only an individual spirit. The outer layers that wrap spirit around are related to the behavior of an organism that cannot survive without practical action. Although at times the pragmatists seem to recognize something like what Santayana calls spirit, the entire bent of their philosophy refuses to dissociate mind from ongoing activity. As a result, their thinking easily merges with behaviorism, and even when they are not limiting themselves to motor behavior, they tend to interpret consciousness as itself being active or operational in a covert, if not an overt, manner. For the most part, pragmatism denies that anything like spirit can be distinguished from the more or less intelligent behavior of an organism that grows through its interaction with an environment—the self is a function of its social and biological development and cannot harbor any private or inviolable core. In his opposition to pragmatism, Santayana admits that spirit comes into being only as the culmination of material processes, but he insists that in principle it is different from any practical activity. On his view, there must be *something* in the human mind which observes our interaction with the environment without itself being a function of that interaction. Unlike Pascal, Santayana would not think of the kernel as being immortal or necessarily valuable in its purified isolation; but like Pascal, he does think of this mental factor as something that must not be confused with the experience that encircles it. In the autobiography one often finds him making

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statements such as the following: "I might wish to change my surroundings and my way of living; I never undertook to change myself. I regard my occupations and interests somewhat as an actor regards his various parts or a painter his subjects. . ." etc.

Santayana's allegiance to some form of the kernel theory serves to clarify many of his other attitudes towards life, as well as the basis of his quarrels with pragmatism. For instance, it is not surprising that, despite his love of tradition and order, Santayana's political views were essentially those of nineteenth century liberalism, just as it is not surprising that Dewey's politics were fundamentally collectivistic. For if there is no kernel and our personalities are wholly a function of interaction with the environment, the self can never really be detached from either nature or society. As a result, collectivism becomes the groundwork upon which individual liberties must be constructed. If, however, we start from Santayana's point of departure, as did Locke and the founding fathers, we begin with man as a separate kernel which society ought not to tamper with. Society and nature alike may be useful and even indispensable for the complete happiness of the kernel, but they are of only secondary importance, as befits derivative instrumentalities. On the pragmatic view, we are primordially a part of one another, so that our spirals interweave and we attain our freedom through the individual stamp that each of us impresses upon the inescapable community. On Santayana's view, we are primordially separate entities whose outer layers overlap without our inner cores ever penetrating one another. And even overlapping, he would say, can be justified only as it allows each individual kernel to fulfill itself.

Similarly, Santayana's aloofness from political and social duties, and in general his avoidance of active experience, is accounted for, or at least symbolized, by his adherence to the kernel theory. In part, it also explains his tolerance for the attitudes of others and his more or less egoistical concern for his own. If a man is secure within his kernel, he need not be afraid because others see the world differently. If they do, it means that their kernels are different from, but not necessarily preferable to or in conflict with, one's own. Likewise, one could help others fulfill themselves not by directly contributing to their development, as the spiral theory would tend to suggest, but merely by refusing to impose restric-

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tive outer layers. Since one could not change the inner core, one did best to leave it alone. This, in turn, increased the likelihood of being let alone oneself.

It is in this context that Santayana goes so far as to admit that he is both selfish and heartless in his attempt to "resist human contagion, except provisionally, on the surface, and in matters indifferent to me." Still, as he also points out, his selfishness was never competitive or aggressive. It was merely the self-absorption of a man who tried to live in the spirit at the same time as he remained at home within the life of reason. Did he secure the best of both worlds, or did he exclude himself from each in turn? Opinion has varied; and I, for one, would hesitate to judge. Perhaps it is enough to recognize that Santayana's selfishness was the devotion of a gardener cultivating what nature gave him. And surely, if the world is not to waste, *some* of its gardeners must be selfish in the way that Santayana was.

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JOHN HOLLANDER

Icarus Before Knossos

For Donald Cook

Winter, in a white rage of urgency,
From what we know of knowledge, serves it poorly,
And the cold, the cold alone, in painful freezing
Dries up so much motion that the course
Of measurement is shrivelled to a trace,
The following finger, gliding eye and ranging
Sense, all stopped, as in an emergency
Of waiting. The sun will start them moving, surely,
When the spring comes, the river bed releasing
New turbulence, the frozen field, its marsh,
And vision, all the fluid processes
Which comprehend embellishment and changing.

But can the sun surely save us? In December
The fixed precision of cold and snow infers
The eventual elegance of thaws and freshets,
But when the frozen sense of measurement
Revives and moves like wild emergent honey,
We cannot accept our winter propositions;
For then, with the sun upon us, we remember
That old prayers were extrapolations, fears
Held in the cold were no mere casual guesses:
There will be no sun this spring. The sun is spent.
Meanwhile the sun's own seasonal miscellany
Proclaims on every page our death's directions.

Thus reasoning, and having thoroughly read
Various journals of my own few seasons,
I turned to that golden annal of the heart:
The Very Rich Hours, the old illuminations
Of love's most famous scenery, and marked
How, through the very Hiems and the Vers,
The prospect held its properties, and bred
Simple disguises for its several versions.

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Here, though, a tower and there, a tree imparted
A fearful permanence to those bright distractions
Bound in the book of all my own heart's work,
A passage too continuous to be parsed.

The question was whether to live like trees or towers,
Evolving from the bare hills like conifers,
Pretending ignorance of the changes of winter,
Or standing bare as sorrow in the snow,
Striped red and green to show one's parentage
In the colored rocks of the hills he's quarried from.
Was memory to be the philogeny of towers
Or the languages of trees? A Past, that honors
Bright spears and perils held surely to the canter,
Or a History, with garlands at the brow
Of verdure and all her silent heritage?
The branch, or the eternal stone to come?

No longer being young, I can remember
Many trees, and the effigies of trees,
Tuscany and spruces, bright squares of Venice,
Pale domes, palmettos, and the shocking cactus
Of our own adequate West, the impact of images
Observed on journeys entirely by train;
Not yet being old, I have still time to consider
More journeys taken in a rage, and effigies
Of towers that look like trees, and will surely vanish.
But to put these dialectics into practice
I'll await no ceremonies of future rages,
For trees may be trained to look like towers by then;

Or towers like trees: old images, and awkward,
Explained by the leaveless shapes of cold December
But not without terror for me. I had the fear
That in such architecture was designed
My own undoing: Gray buttresses of branches,
Stones cut like leaves and crossed with mullioned fronds,
And above all, the bells, so rudely quartered,
And above that, an even more cramped chamber
Where you, *maudit sois tu,* carilloneur,
Rang changes out on the bronzed fruit, comprised

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Of seasonal intervals, till the bells in bunches
Dropped, crying *Autumn, Autumn!* to the winds.

Those syllables rang our death, could we contrive
To prove that towers were founded in the air
For purposes of the bells, or the sorrowful clocks,
Inevitably articulate in the silence
Of structured branches and high, arch, espaliers
Of stone. Could we irrevocably commend
Those hours and bells to our attention, love
Might never find the sure escapement there,
Nor lands, lit by versions of the sun we lack,
House our retreating hearts in fiery dalliance,
For in time, the goldenmost of shining trees
Emerge in fierce white winter at fall's end.

But as fruit itself must drop, in the rusts of autumn,
It falls to the pealing of the bells to crack
With cold, where the pallid eye of the wintered sun
Governs the runnings of the months, whose fashions
Of careless and phenomenal change subvert
The truest tower or the oldest tree;
But I dared publish, in one agreeable emblem,
The tower and the tree, and turned my back
On lunatic winter's generations
Of marshy flight and white return, its passing,
Seasonal governments of the frightened heart
Which go unpunished in their simony.

And I journeyed from the North, and stopped to sit
In this ringed city, in the South of Something,
Hung under the sun by old geometers,
Constructed to maintain a shining commerce
Over the green sea, washing the rocks at its feet.
Set high above the burning cliffs above them,
Birds perch on golden finials, and lit
By an eternal sun, describe in their turning
No differences of wind, but what appears
To serve this silent city as a promise
Left by departing gods as they plunged, reeling,
Under the cold green washes of the ocean.

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Upon that promise I turned an augury
That pierced through the binding and reflected sunlight
With the golden and prophetic craft; it read:
There will be no spring in the sun. The months are spent.
December and the others have fled their names
And seasons; the final shining of the sun
Has merged with fragments of the winter's fury
The spring's relenting tempers, and even tunnelled
Under the thundering sea, lest there be laid
Submerged, on the structures of its floor, the bent
And rusted relics of those seasonal changes
Which fouled its triumph of redemption.

And upon that prophecy I have turned to journey
Over the wild surge, in a tumbling ship,
Breaking the cloudy spume and following after
Wide bays and curving beaches, while its course
Holds always to the one, quotidian,
High engine of ascendancy, overhead.
The wind trumpets hoarsely through the waves; we turn
Toward the ultimate island, whose first blazing cape
The sun discerns, across the roaring water:
Painted Crete is upon us, and all its shores
Show forth, as we cross the last meridian
That marks the land's edge and the water's end,

And where, at the brink of the bay, a ploughman turns
His implement into the hill, not as he would
In the mild agriculture of a pastoral,
But, having wrung the ever-ripening fruit
From out his orchard, urges his devotion
Upon the earth in fury, all unaware
Of my arrival and deliverance.
Is his mute husbandry to be understood
As a rite of love? or as a festival
Of fear for the myth delivered at his feet,
As though, tomorrow, full over the green ocean,
He might behold it, falling from the air?

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WILLIAM EASTLAKE

Two Gentlemen from America

AN AMERICAN WRITER NAMED PYLE had just left his wife called Baby and was on his way to see a young poet named Alfred. Baby called her husband Papa and Pyle called Alfred in a loud voice and Alfred came the way Alfreds always will for the rich or successful, and Pyle was some of each. Now Papa rode down on the elevator with two baseball players going to the game who were discussing their trade. They were in uniform except for the spikes which they held in their hands. Papa came in on the middle of their conversation but he was interested. The older player standing slouched near the door was saying: "Politics. It's all politics. I'm through with the big leagues. It's all politics. As I was saying, Leo calls me into his office and says, Hank, why don't you take them up on that Mexican offer? Because they don't pay enough. Well, starting tomorrow, after your contract's up they're paying you more than we're paying you here. It wouldn't be those four errors I made this week was it, Leo? Oh, no, forget it, Hank, we all make errors—remember I hired you. You play ball with me, Leo, and I'll play ball with you. That kind of stopped him. He fingered his chin and then he said, don't take it so hard, Hank. Consider yourself an ambassador of good will to the Latin American countries—you know like Gehrig and the Babe. They all went down there as ambassadors of good will. You wouldn't give me a snow job, Leo? You know me, Hank. That's right, I know you, Leo, I told him, but they tell me O'Dwyer's the ambassador to Mexico. O'Dwyer's in jail, he said. That ain't the way I heard it, I said. Have I ever given you a bum steer yet, he said. Never, I said, you play ball with me, Leo, and I'll play ball with you. OK, good bye for Mexico, he said, and don't take too much of what ever they use for money down there. They tell me it's heavy stuff."

"Yes, that reminds me," the other ballplayer on the other side of the elevator said: "that reminds me, you booted three for us yesterday."

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"Politics," the older one said as he walked out of the elevator. "Politics. It's all politics. Everything is politics."

You could blow that up into a screen treatment, Papa thought as he walked through the cluttered lobby, and sell it to MGM. The love life of a Mexican shortstop or the effects of the cosmic ray upon the nether ball. It's about time for a film cycle in both of those departments. I must take it up with my bootblack.

Papa was feeling alive over the prospects of a drink as he stepped out into the hard, one o'clock Mexican sun. He had to cross the street to avoid going by O'Flynn's. O'Flynn's was run by a stout hearty woman from the States who believed in good home cooking and convivial fellowship. There was a neat, gold-lettered sign in back of the bar, A HOME AWAY FROM HOME. Hearty and wholesome Mrs. O'Flynn was, at the moment, having trouble with the Mexican authorities. They accused her of running a dirty joint. To run a dirty joint in Mexico, Papa thought, would take a lot of talent. Still, in her own right, Mrs. O'Flynn was a genius. Two years ago she had cornered Papa and two Iowa farmers. Eat this, she had said, her hair falling down in her red splotched face. There's no damn Mexican germs in this place. This is a good wholesome American place for good wholesome Americans and the God damn Mexicans accuse me of running a dirty joint. Who pays their taxes? I do. Who supports their church? I do. Who supports their crooked government? Who supports their stealing and whoring? I do. And who says I'm running a dirty joint?

They do, Papa and the two Iowa farmers had chorused.

Yes, and I'm running a good respectable American joint, she said, her hair now falling down in her red eyes. You pick up a girl in here you don't get no clap.

Please Mrs. O'Flynn, one of the Iowa farmers had said gently.

Sure there are ladies present, she had shrieked. I don't cater to nothing but ladies. That's what I keep telling them down at the consulate and they keep saying . . .

You're running a dirty joint, Mrs. O'Flynn, Papa and the two farmers had said quietly together.

Yes, she had said, collapsing on the beer-stained table. I only want to give the Americans a little oasis—a little oasis in this stinking dirty Mexico. I only want to give the Americans a home

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away from home. Politics, Mrs. O'Flynn had sobbed, her whole fat body shaking. It's all politics.

Papa waited in the middle of the street for an automobile to bluff him. Yes, the plot thickens, he thought. Mrs. O'Flynn and the ambassador of a shortstop versus the government. But, he thought, across the street now, it's not only Mrs. O'Flynn I'm beating in this detour. It's a double steal. I'm also avoiding the Captain's Tres Estrellas by taking this side of the street.

The two competitors had set up their stands on the same side of the street, between the two most important hotels in town, hoping to catch the Americans coming and going and falling down. You could be brave and walk right in front of them but Papa was saving his bravery for the Belmonte. Whereas Mrs. O'Flynn's pitch was a little bit of America in Mexico, the Captain's pitch was a little bit of Mexico in Mexico. Where else, outside of the Hollywood movies, can you find some authentic Mexico? he said out of a gray stubbled face of sixty-five. Where else can you find the Mexico that never has or never will exist? Where else can you find the handhewn floor, Mexicans in bright colorful costumes made in Brooklyn singing songs taught to them by Americans? Where else can you get a heavy tiled roof supported by oven baked beans (note beans, not beams)—the Captain was a bore. The Captain was not an ordinary bore, that is, running a restaurant was not first and his being a bore incidental. The Captain was first and foremost a bore; he lived to be a bore. Way back he was trained carefully in it. It wasn't only having gone to West Point, having served in France with Captain Eddie Rickenbacker. It wasn't that accidental. It started way back in childhood. His training was exact and meticulous so that one day he would be the champion bore of the world. He would have to go to some small town in Mexico where there would be Americans who did not speak Spanish, where they would have to come to him and listen to him until their two weeks vacation was up. Papa's vacation was up after six minutes and forty seconds of Captain Eddie Rickenbacker on the raft—after one minute of a grease- and tropic-stained letter of commendation from General John J. Pershing to the Captain on the commendable manner in which he ran his supply dump—and after one and a half of the Captain's jokes. The half of a joke ran like this: the everywhere

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Captain, somewhere with the Rainbow division, now at a British dressing station after having been wounded in a heroic action involving a twenty minute detailed description of an adroit and cunning manipulation of the bayonet far above, behind and beyond the call of duty: on the British operating table with the cockney surgeon knifing over him—The Captain—Am I going to die? The cockney surgeon—No, tomorrow.

Papa passed the Captain's reviewing stand of the restaurant, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but like a good doughfoot, a good member of the American Expeditionary Forces, plowing straight ahead. Papa plowed straight ahead to the bar of the Belmonte where he knew he would find Alfred.

As Papa walked into the bar of the Belmonte, Alfred seemed to be watching the place where he made his entrance. Alfred waved to him. Papa went over and sat down at the hand-painted, tile-topped table.

"That man from the bull-ring was just in here looking for you," Alfred said, moving his drink.

"Oh?"

"Yes," Alfred said. "It's all off."

"All off?" Papa said annoyed. "What do you mean, all off?"

"He said that the city authorities would not allow you—allow you. . ." Alfred hesitated.

"To make a damn fool of myself," Papa said.

"No. They just said it would be too dangerous for an amateur."

"Who's in there with that bull, the city fathers or me?" Papa asked.

Alfred looked away from Papa and down at the drink, took it off one tile and onto another.

"You are," he said, placing the drink cautiously back on the original tile. "You are. But nobody really cares. You should be pleased that someone seems to care."

Papa hunched forward on the table, pleased that he had caught Alfred drinking. For the first time he felt he could get into Alfred's mind, get around all Alfred's literary cliches. For the first time he felt a real advantage over Alfred and he would push it—not push it too much or too hard, but push it gently for all it was worth.

"You were saying?" Papa said.

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"Just that you have fought and defeated a whole generation." Alfred's eyes were not focussing, staring at his glass of green liquid. "And you have given us a very interesting description of death—interesting and exciting ways of achieving it—and now you are stumbling around in no-man's land with nobody to fight but straw men. You are defenseless and somebody could come out and knock you off, but nobody cares." Alfred weighed the drink in his hand. "Nobody is interested."

"You didn't care for my last book?" Papa said gently.

"The last book?" Alfred said, tilting his drink and watching it, glassy-eyed. "It wasn't necessarily the last. It might have been the first or the second or the third. It wasn't the last. It was the same. It was still about *I* and *Death* when people are interested now in *Us* and *Life*."

"It sold half a million copies," Papa said, and before he had gotten it out he knew it was the most horrible thing he had ever heard anybody say. Alfred had laid a new kind of trap for him—a trap that Alfred in his drunkenness was not even conscious of having laid. There seemed to be a trap in it for Papa no matter what people said. It was as though he were going around laying his own traps in other people's minds.

"Half a million copies!" Alfred said, smiling now. "Well, I'll let you answer that one."

Yes, Papa thought, he could answer that one easily. Alfred was operating with the tremendous advantage of the tequila, Papa thought. Now he couldn't think of anything else to do but bull it through, so he said, "Five hundred thousand copies. People must be interested."

"Perhaps," Alfred said, sliding the word on an alcoholic tongue. "Interested perhaps, but not concerned. Curiosity, let's call it—a curiosity to watch you flail around in your no-man's land, a no-man's land that existed because you described it so excellently but that no longer exists because you have made it a parody of yourself. Flailing at straw men who also existed for a while because you also described those so excellently too, but only for a while because they were not alive because they were your *I* and not our *Us*. Because they were full of a proud self-pity that is death and not life. Because what you wrote became the opium of what you write." Alfred hesitated a while and there was a big

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silence. "Papa became the opium of Papa," he said. "And then," he continued in the drunken monotone, "they are curious watching you all alone out there the way you willed it—all alone out there with your hurt, waiting for the enemy that does not arrive —all alone and flailing at tigers and bulls and straw men, with your big hurt. They are curious to see if you will come home again or whether you will go down out there in one of your so excellently described green hells. Or whether you will go off to some wild, serene mountain top of the mind where you can journey forever all alone."

Papa got up heavily. "You need another drink, boy. You need another drink bad. It was going pretty good for a while, and Papa has become the opium of Papa is not a bad line. Then the whole thing bogs down in cheap rhetoric. People aint going to pay to hear talk like that. People will want their money back, Alfred. If you have some aggressions to work off against me, Alfred, write a book about me. Maybe make yourself a piece of money, a little cheap fame. You might build it around the gimmick that I, perhaps, hold the unique distinction of being the only person of my generation who didn't get lost. Use anything you like except a few words I have patented—use cojones if you like—I didn't think it fair to patent that—but the others—lay off the others . . . Me, myself, I'm fair game. I've put them all in my stuff, those close to me and even the generals and the president. But don't use those few words I've got patented. But do a bag job on me, Alfred. I've got so much sycophantic stuff written about me it's coming out of my ears. I'm getting to feel like Tom Rover or the fun loving Ned. But I will buy you a drink. What are you drinking, Alfred?"

Alfred swashed the yellowish contents of his glass around and leaned forward to examine it but didn't say anything to Papa. He was looking up at Papa and not seeing him.

"Stay on the firing line," Papa said, "and I will go to the rear and see if I can drum up some ammunition."

Papa walked over to the long heavy mahogany bar that was the furniture of the place before the revolution. Everything in the bar was the furniture of the place before the revolution. The six varnish-darkened nudes of cheap imitation Italian Classical, the heavy oak chairs, the brass cuspidors, the oak-stained face of the

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bartender and his brassy voice, his flourished mustache, his long white apron, his knotted string tie, all went back to before the revolution.

The only thing that does not go back to before the revolution in this fake, Papa thought, is Alfred, and Alfred goes back to the day before yesterday. Papa leaned on the bar.

"What has my boy been drinking?" Papa asked in the voice of a conspirator.

The bartender leaned forward with his best conspiratorial air, hiking his white-shirted arm up close to Papa's shooting jacket. He had on an elastic band above the elbow to keep his cuff up or to show how pre-revolutionary he really was.

"Tequila cocktails," the bartender answered finally, drawing his hand up to his mouth as though to hide the words.

"Sugar," Papa said. "Surprised you're serving a drink with sugar in it, Chico."

The bartender spread his hands gently in front of his mustache, saying, without saying it: What can I do? It's against my better judgment but I work here.

The bartender was cooperative with Papa because Papa was very generous. Papa thought he had realized quite early in life that the bartenders were the doctors of his generation. There wasn't much they couldn't cure and if you thought there was one hurt they couldn't cure, they could really cure that too if you cooperated with them long enough and didn't mind the consequences. Papa had bartender intimates in Spain who would lay down their life for him, bartender intimates in Italy that might lay down their family for him, a bartender that Papa was certain of in Paris who would lay down his mistress for him, and a couple in the States who might even lend him a buck.

"And what will you lay down for me?" Papa asked the bartender.

"Que quiere?" the bartender answered, still intimate, talking through his hands.

"Another one of the sugar drinks for the boy," Papa said. "And give me a tequila—straight tequila and a lime on the side. I can carry the salt all by myself."

"Como no?" the bartender said, shuffling off down the bar.

While the bartender was mixing the drinks Papa folded his

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hands across his chest and speculated on the ultimate truth. Not the ultimate truth actually. Spinoza and the boys had wrapped that up, but Papa was carrying it beyond that to the ultimate universal truth which was that business in this gin mill was bad, that so far Alfred and himself were the only customers and so far they had been on the cuff. It was early but even this early business would be good at the Stork Club.

"The Stork Club is a clip joint in New York," Papa explained to the bartender. "No, I withdraw that," Papa said. "For the record I will say that I clipped many people at the Stork Club. The Stork Club is your competitor," Papa explained.

"Como no?" the bartender grunted, not paying attention, busy with the drinks.

"But I have outgrown that—that is, I don't clip anybody—I mean I don't go there any more. Now I go to the Garden when I am in New York and watch people who get paid for that sort of thing. When I am in New York I also visit the Modern Museum where some of my best painter friends hang."

"Como no?" the bartender said over the noise of the mixing machine.

"My good friend, Humphrey Hogarth, has taken over the job of clipping people in the night clubs," Papa went on in an explaining voice. "You know that great cinema star?" Papa asked. "Como no?" Papa helped the bartender this time. "It seems," Papa said, "there is a great deal of talk in Hollywood that my friend Humphrey Hogarth is not getting along with his producer, Samuel R. Donnybright Jr. so my friend Humphrey Hogarth took a full page in Variety to acknowledge the rumors and confound his critics with the big words I LOVE SAMUEL R. DONNYBRIGHT JR."

The bartender had the drinks ready now and he set them on the bar. "Muy, muy interesante," he said.

Papa brought the drinks over to the table and set the sugar drink in front of Alfred, put the paraphernalia of his own drink opposite Alfred and sat down. Alfred was hunched forward on the tile-topped table and the two drinks, the one nearly empty and the one full, were in front of his eyes so that he almost had to look through the liquid to see Papa. Papa arranged his own drink on a ritual basis, tapping some of the salt on the heel of his

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thumb, carrying the lime between his thumb and his first finger and holding the full white glass of tequila in the other hand. When he began the ceremony of drinking it he told Alfred that drink was one of the important things of this world and that people shouldn't slop over it. He said that when people went to a university meeting or a seminar or to church they didn't slop over it—they didn't arrive at any of these dignified occasions drunk. And when people drink alcohol, which is the most important ritual in the life of man, they shouldn't get drunk either. He also said, as though it were an afterthought, as he was placing the lime carefully—"And how about you and my wife, Alfred?"

"But we were criticizing your writing," Alfred said, parting the drinks so he could see more clearly.

"Yes, and at your age that is foolishness, Alfred, and at a later age it is damn foolishness. Critics are people who can't spare what they think are the necessary fifteen minutes to write a novel but they can spare a month to take somebody else's work apart. Tolstoy was good when he called them the parasites of the generation. He would have been more correct if he called them the lazy people of the generation. I'm not speaking of those who write for the magazines and the newspapers, they are too worthless to discuss, I'm speaking of those who write for the precious papers. They could have been saved if someone had gotten hold of them when they were four years old. You're not four years old, Alfred, but you're close enough to it in many ways for somebody to get hold of you and straighten you out."

"Straighten me out," Alfred said, mumbling the words. "I've spent the last two hours straightening you out. Where do you think I was for the last two hours? Well, I was over at the Mayor's office. I told him that that fat, greedy murderer over at the bull-ring could not be allowed to murder you in a fiesta to attract tourists. I threatened to bring the American Consulate in on it and the Mayor called the bull-ring manager on the phone while I was there and called the whole thing off."

Papa put down the paraphernalia of the salt and the lime and arranged it in front of himself and examined it.

"Oh, that puts the thing in a different light," he said, watching the ingredients. "I thought for a while that maybe this beef could not be squared. I thought for a while he might have called it off

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because he couldn't make any money on it, that he had signed the Stockholm Peace Pledge or had joined Bullfighters Anonymous —some religious absolute that I could not fix in my mind but something that would keep him beyond my reach. But now that you have explained, the fear is gone."

"It's not going to be easy to fix," Alfred said, taking the fresh drink and sipping some of it, but not sitting up, still pitched forward and tipping the drink forward to drink it. "It's not going to be easy to fix because the American Consulate is in on it."

"So you brought them in on it too?" Papa said fed up and carefully. "Alfred, I appreciate your contributing to the story line, I appreciate your not wanting me to be surrounded with a bunch of flat characters who do not become involved in the plot, but, by Christ, Alfred, the next time you want to make a contribution to the forward movement of the plot—wreck my car, entertain my wife, but don't kill my bull. Don't try to louse me up. Never kill my bull."

Papa tossed off the drink. "Now, Alfred," he said importantly, "I am going to find the bull man and fix everything you have tried to destroy. And while I am gone I would appreciate it very much if you would go up and see Baby. Baby is very low and she needs your company. You are very low too, Alfred, and two lows might add up to something. Anyway, Alfred, I go," he said, getting up and walking towards the bar.

He had another quick drink at the bar, paid the bill, tipped the bartender and told him to live dangerously. Outside, under the bloody egg yolk fire of a Mexican sun he decided, somewhere in the inner darkness of his mind, to forego all of his plans and search for something to smash.

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ROBERT FITZGERALD

The Painter[1]

On bluish inlets bristling
Black in the tall north
Like violet ghosts risen
The great fish swam forth,
And hoary blooms and submarine
Lightning in the cradling west
Lent summer her virid sheen
For the deep eye's interest.

A fleece on furry nothing
A web of nightfall grey
And a leaf tangled, mothing
In a well of yellow day,
Gave him a mile of corner
For a picture like a sea—
The sail and the dream sojourner
Outlined in ivory.

A lank hand had his master
To shear through light like tin
And bitter taste of plaster
When jackboots shook Berlin;
And wine clusters, Venetian,
And Burgundy and France,
And coral and carnelian
Bled white under his glance.

Now shall the man of dust live
Or the green man of mould?
The whetted winter rustling
Snows on the Baltic cold,
Where Ma'amselle and the trooper
Embraced against the fire,
Aflame in the icy pupil;
And art unfleshed desire.

[1]Written for the occasion of an exhibition of paintings by Kurt Roesch, held at the Curt Valentin Gallery, New York, 1953.

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STANLEY KUNITZ

The Scourge

My heart felt need to die,
Our dusty time had come;
I said, "Endure the lie,
The waste, the tedium."

My heart sank to his knees,
Schooled in the tragic style,
But I, being out of heart,
Whipped him another mile,

And not because I cared
To let that actor go,
But only that I feared
His eternal No, No, No.

Beyond the covered bridge
The crooked road turned wild;
He rose at the season's edge,
Passionate and defiled,

Plucking the remnant leaf
Stained with the only good,
While all my children leaped
Out of the glowing wood.

Rover

How shall I keep this violence in,
My no-name and my nothing-knows,
Original with fire and sin,
My mastiff breed? Citizens, close
Your doors; be warned, a man has lost
His dog, suspected to be mad,
Last seen prevailing down the coast

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From Boston Light to Trinidad;
Biter of joys, a beast apart,
Sucked on the cold teat of the will,
Rolled in the ordure of the heart,
Gorged on the discontents that kill.

"Rover!" I call my fourfoot home,
Whose only language is a growl;
Dig up old bones, but he won't come
That chose the world: it is more foul.

RONALD PERRY

Nocturne

At sun-fall, behind screens, looking out,
The trees are ghosts of table-legs,
And the improbability
Of dusk a perpetual surprise.

Sun-fall in a Mexican dish,
Yellow and crimson.
The repetition of similar sea and sky
In a world of cabinets.

Now the chairs have eyes in their rungs,
And sorrow is an imperfection,
An insistence
On grief that implies permanence.

Sun-fall. The arrangement of faces
On a magazine cover, complacent, inviolable.
Bewilderment of orange
In the detail of the wax fruit.

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JOSEPH BENNETT

On the Parkway

Of which you spoke: the vast abstraction.
Of this, the time. Here the gears
Spinning in subtle fluids leave a trace
Only in fumes, and hear the tires
Lapping the ribboned concrete of your skills.

Greens devised for the savage glance
Swerve among the freighted hills.
Green timbers fill the curtained parks
Of runways slipping past the earth.

Adhesively the pavement curves
Beyond the distant reach of land.
Beyond the furthest park the greens
Blend into the final ground.

The flesh of rabbits and the fur
Stains the surface of the plane.
Euclidean the planner here
Provides ecstatic auguries.

Repeat, repeat, the wheels repeat
The heavy tremor on the liquid track.
The summits rise to further hills,
And blended distances resolve in one.

It is the end, it is the end,
Beyond the curve of the sacred boats;
It is the end, beyond the pass,
Between the close-cropped priestly lawns.

The vessels glide; it is the end.
The plateau sunset flames the hills.
The valley glows and cools. The deathless ones,
The hooded gods, arise, propitiate,
Unsmiling from the crystal streams.

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JAMES MERRILL

A Narrow Escape

During a lull at dinner the vampire frankly
Confessed herself a symbol of the inner
Adventure. An old anxiousness took hold
Like a mesmerist hissing for each of us
To call up flitterings from within,
Crags and grottos, an olive dark that lured
Casements to loosen gleamings onto the Rhine.
More fluently than water she controlled
The vista. Later, von Blon said he had known
Her expressionless face before, her raven braids
—But where? A tale . . . a mezzotint? The tone
Was that of an 1830 pianoforte.
There followed for each a real danger of falling
Into the oubliette of that bland face,
Perfectly warned of how beneath it lay
The bat's penchant for sleeping all day long
Then flying off upon the wildest tangents
With little self-preserving shrieks, also
For ghastly scenes over letters and at meals,
Not to speak of positive evil, those nightly
Drainings of one's life, the blood, the laugh,
The cries for pardon, the indifferences
—*And all performed with such a virtuoso's*
Detachment from say their grandmothers' experience,
That men in clubs would snort incredulously
Provided one escaped to tell the story.
It was then Charles thought to wonder, peering over
The rests of venison, what on earth a vampire
Means by the inner adventure. Her retort
Is now a classic, in our particular circle.

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MARCUS KLEIN

San Francisco and Her Hateful Ambrose Bierce

In December of 1913 Ambrose Bierce, seventy-one years old and a self-designated battle correspondent, just disappeared into a war in Mexico. He was even then obscure, having grossly outlived his career and hence his publicity, but his suicide, presuming it was a suicide, aroused a certain kind of interest. He died very well, in terms of the magazine thriller. Indeed, the real mystery of Ambrose Bierce is that he managed his death so much more gracefully and so much more logically than he ever did his life. His death rightly compelled attention, a thing he had for many years missed. But it was at the same time an attention unliterary, rather ghoulish, and at best trivial. The public felt no loss, and despite a multiplicity of biographies and literally scores of inflamed appreciations, justice has not subsequently been done.

Bierce had never been famous, but he was more than curious, and he had had in his day a peculiar, often cultist, always local, but nonetheless gaudy notoriety. He had been "Bitter Bierce" and "The Wickedest Man in San Francisco". He had been celebrated, even adored, with the ready and effervescent civic spirit of the San Franciscans, as their very own. Delightful in sarcasm, splendid in heresy, he was in fact the court jester, to whom impudence was allowed. He had created merriment by shooting dogs. He would but for an ordinance have shot all dog-lovers, and he was loved because he roared with mirth at the mention of a minister. He told off-color stories about the dead and, as a matter of journalistic integrity, advocated violence towards well-enough-meaning anti-evolutionists, feminists, Socialists, regionalists, sports fans, fat babies, and democracy. He had argued long and wittily in favor of suicide (an interesting number of literary San Franciscans seem to have been convinced) and warmly, on high eugenic principles, for the castration of all criminals. As a journalist, daily columnist

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(the first in America), and as a professional gossip, hatchet-man and literary critic, he had lived for some thirty years a scandal, which was hotly admired but not precisely a success, of exceptionally constant abuse and ridicule. He had been impertinent for a population anxious for thrills.

"And at the end of it," Bierce wrote in one of his many quasi-suicide notes, "all we see is that nothing matters." He was referring in the particular instance to his literary career, in which he was disappointed, but he had said the same thing often before and in various circumstances, and in two words it completely, as he wrote to George Sterling, expressed his philosophy. It was no philosophic contribution. Bierce had not thought things out, but he was neither being facile nor striking a cheaply amazing pose. That nothing mattered was for him revealed and conspicuous truth, the consequences of which he quite accepted, and what passed for his impertinence derived from it. But true or not, and neurotic, as has to monotony been suggested, or not, that fearfully codified hostility described an attitude in America and in his time exceptional to the point of blunt unsociability. What was and is undiscovered is that Bierce was almost alone in his ability to say, as epitaph and as dogma—almost, at the end, casually—that really nothing mattered, and what is unnoted is that this attitude, a premature rebellion combining energy and disenchantment, was, in that twilight time of American letters, a premonition of a new freedom.

The period after the Civil War (Bierce, with De Forest, is one of the two writers of even moderate consequence who were in the War) gave that attitude some legitimacy. But it was not voiced, by at least implied assent, until it became actually, after the turn of the century and especially after the First World War, even respected. There was suddenly a new tone in American letters, generated of no school and in its instances specifically so dissimilar as Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, *Three Soldiers*, and the metaphysical revival. But the instances shared an identity. There flowered a new attention to facts, stubborn and inelegant, and at the same time a reaction, often lost in the bloom of its own fury, against decades of progressively less meaningful idealism. Writers of the new generation celebrated, beyond narrow inspirations like naturalism and the seventeenth-century conceit, the will

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to think toughly, lucidly, and, if need be, disagreeably. Truth became a problem, and was found not necessarily to exist in what had conventionally been named beauty. There was a new attitude, issuing from many circumstances, but in great part from the revolt against the Romantic Movement, its prison, its decay, its conspicuous inadequacy and the oppression of its legacy to late-nineteenth-century America. The new attitude, calling for compact realities, was characterized abroad by T. E. Hulme, who suddenly saw the "World as finite, and so there was no longer any refuge in infinites of grandeur", and who with the clarity and authority of the man who finally buries the corpse, described the necessity for it:

> Each field of artistic activity is exhausted by the first great artist who gathers a full harvest from it. This period of exhaustion seems to me to have been reached in romanticism. We shall not get any new efflorescence of verse until we get a new technique, a new convention, to turn ourselves loose in.

The new convention actually, by the time Hulme called for it, was in advanced development, but the formulation, given a few years, was exact. Hulme could observe conservatively, ironically, with studied superfluity, "I think that there is an increasing proportion of people who simply can't stand Swinburne." It was a truism, and a sentiment that twenty-five years earlier no writer in America who valued his popularity would have dared affect. (And indeed even Bierce, who was vain in other ways and who logically should have objected, thought *Atalanta in Calydon* "one of the noblest poems in our language.") Bierce was actively sarcastic through the last three decades of the century, which may well enough be defined as that period of exhaustion. It was not a period merely of questionable taste, but of bad taste unyielding, of a popular appetite enforced—if not by Swinburne, by Tennyson and then by Kipling and Robert Louis Stevenson. The commercially successful poet of Bierce's generation was supremely James Whitcomb Riley; the most respected was the sedate and powerful editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Thomas Bailey Aldrich.

Bierce practised journalism—never quite literature—in San Francisco, which was not like the rest of the country but which shared with it, discounting perhaps significant but minor erup-

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tions, its adoration of unreasoning optimism (large enough, in the nineties, to include Omar Khayyam's hedonism), benevolence, beauty, sadness, and tremulous sentiment. One has only, to discover what the country thought good, thought poetry, to turn the pages of Edmund Clarence Stedman's *An American Anthology,* published at the turn of the century. By far the most popular poet in the West was Joaquin Miller; his closest rival was Edwin Markham, who had given socialism to Tennyson and who had in "The Man with the Hoe" made beautiful the peasants' revolt in a way that somehow had nothing to do with incipient and bloody unionism, the thievery of the railroads, the problem of Chinese immigration, the fantastic civic corruption, and the abominations of the waterfront. The period was delivered to goodness beyond need of light and beyond the possibility of vitality. In such a republic, the rejection Bierce dared, if itself romantically inflated beyond belief, was phenomenal. It was to Americans and much more to San Franciscans, though discounted by their disbelief, frightening.

The time had, of course, its other critics, both literary and social. If it was the age of gilt, the time of Morgan and Mark Hanna and of the great fortunes, it was the time also of difficult industrial transition, of economic crisis, and of the Populist revolt. The old order lingered on, Emerson and Melville and Whitman, and at the same time there were Howells and Mark Twain. Edward Eggleston had broken ground for realism with *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* in 1871 and in 1880 Henry Adams had published anonymously his unromantic *Democracy,* and there had been Ed Howe and Henry Fuller and Joseph Kirkland and then Harold Frederic, but they constituted only the opposition. One cannot say they were not read, but Eggleston was proud of his book's having sold in twenty years as many copies as a contemporary success had sold in one season, and if he gave comfort to a few who found unbearable the manic phase of the nation's literature, he was largely overlooked. Those who *were* regarded were Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, whose *Ishmael* and *Self-Raised,* though written more than thirty years before, were through the eighties and nineties to sell over two million copies each; Mrs. Burnett, who was guilty of *Little Lord Fauntleroy;* Ouida, Blackmore, and the Reverend Mr. E. P. Roe; and finally Henri DuMaurier, whose

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Trilby appeared in *Harper's* for January, 1893, and became promptly a pestilence, inspiring even Dreiser to remember moodily that "it had a strange psychologic effect on me at the time". The spokesmen for the era were rather the early Howells who, despite honesty and splendid intentions, had given the novel over to the American girl, and then Aldrich who declined to "vivisect the nightingale". And if Howells' resignation in 1881 from the editorship of the *Atlantic Monthly* was a symbolic episode in the struggle for realism on native grounds, the succession to that pontificate of American letters by Aldrich is also not without significance. It was Aldrich who was the "Enamored architect of airy rhyme", and who pitied

> *A twilight poet, groping quite alone,*
> *Belated, in a sphere where every nest*
> *Is emptied of its music and its wings*

and to whom realism was almost as offensive as foreigners. It was he who united a decaying Brahminism to an anachronistic romanticism, and it was he, despite self-pity, and not the later Howells, who was heard.

The attitude in letters he exploited he also compelled, and it was against that, from which so few escaped, that Bierce so ferociously rebelled. It was a pose of gentility sustained and somehow coupled with ecstasy; the poet was rare and delicate and aesthetic; he did not think and he above all did not hurt. It was a distinguished generation if there is included in it Emily Dickinson who, knowing the unacceptability of her work, did not choose to be of it, and Walt Whitman, who had written of it as early as 1871 in unequivocal terms of anger and despair, and Henry James, who abandoned the disorder and took lessons in reality from Balzac. But the poets accepted by the commoners were Riley and Eugene Field and, for a slightly more cloistered audience, the established poets were of the kind of John Bannister Tabb and the lost Madison Julius Cawein of Kentucky, he who discovered that "There is no rhyme that is half so sweet/As the song of the wind in the rippling wheat." ("Smoothness", Hulme was to declare to the next generation. "Hate it. This is the obsession that starts all my theories.") The attitude of the poet who was both serious and acceptable was expressed at the end of the era by William Winter: "The deadliest foe of the creative impulse is criticism.

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Genius is something that comes without effort and impels its possessor to heroic labor." Genius had the character of a hot spring and it was not to be disciplined. And as it was only artistic discipline that could be criticized, the response of the generation was uncritical and amounted when it was positive, as it often was, to generalized but nonetheless febrile adulation.

Or so it was in the great world, of Boston and New York—but the little world of San Francisco, cunningly made of gold and railroads and Mumm's Champagne, differed only in quantity. It restricted Bierce, who after all wrote for the newspapers, but its attitudes were by Bierce's time less unusual than San Franciscans liked to think.

When Bierce, on September 21, 1867, made his first poetic contribution to San Francisco culture, a series of twenty-two grisly stanzas in terza rima suffused with imagery of ". . . bloody death of stricken day/ And ocean's leprous agony", the city was but eighteen years of age and no longer chaste. The great day was gone, and the world of Bret Harte, the Indians, the banditry, the bad men, the Vigilantes, the "heathen Chinee", the Donnor Pass, the Gentleman from Pike. The Native Sons of the Golden West had already organized and when, in 1869, the transcontinental railroad was completed, there came the day of the railroad kings and an era of gaudy civic corruption, fantastic speculation, rococo "Society", Nob Hill, race wars, unionism (the leaders of which soon became rich and docile), and unlikely devotion to culture. The memory of its classical period was jostled by devoted imitation and institutionalized celebration (as the melancholy founding of the Bohemian Club in 1872), but the vigor and the masculinity were gone. What was left was incredible wealth—there was the gold and then the silver and the Big Bonanza, and then the railroads and the ranches and the port—a city with a greater proportion of college graduates than any other in the country, and the "tradition", which was great sport and which sustained a civic Bohemianism. The result was an ardor for luxury unparalleled in the country, and poetry and the arts were, like the terrapin, considered local delicacies, conspicuously consumed and conspicuously produced.

What San Francisco saw and heard and read was, inevitably, what was coming to the attention of everyone else in America, but San Francisco seems to have given this culture of the seventies

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("It was in the seventies," Parrington commented, "that good taste reached its lowest ebb"), and of the next two decades, a special tribute. Bierce was heroic in his attitude towards an enthusiasm which made discrimination superfluous, but the city remained ineluctably blithe. The period, which was to be drenched in joy, was baptized perhaps by the Great Musical Festival of February 22-26, 1870, a tribute to genius which combined the talents of fifty soloists lent free by Sacramento, the Marysville Philharmonic and Liederkrantz Societies, fifteen hundred adult and three thousand children's voices, three hundred instrumentalists, thirty guardsmen from Company A, First California Guard, with six ten-pound fieldpieces, and one hundred firemen to strike upon fifty anvils with sledge-hammers. And it was only the beginning. Sarah Bernhardt came and was accorded frank and magnificent love, though at least half her audience did not understand French, as was Lillie Langtry, who had already had an affair with New Jersey, Modjeska, Lotta Crabtree, who was overwhelmed and gave San Francisco a fountain, Adelina Patti, and multitudes of lesser singers, dancers, musicians, actors, readers, and poets.

Wilde came in the eighties and inspired the Decorative Arts Club, which flourished with tropical rankness. When Patti came in March of 1884 there were street battles, the glass doors of the theater were broken, and the box office was demolished. "She has become a spectacle," declared the *Argonaut*, "like Jumbo or any other freak." Lillie Langtry later the same year was a similar wonder. And Emma Nevada, a local girl who had done well, was greeted in *La Sonnambula* by "a steady rain of lilies, roses, marguerites and marigolds pour(ing) through the air and pelt(ing) the singer." Audiences paid their fifty or seventy cents and yelled themselves hoarse when Tetrazzini came to the Tivoli in *Lucia* and yelled themselves hoarse again when Laura E. Dainty, in a white nun's-veiling gown puffed at the back, recited "Little Jim" at Moody and Sankey congregations. Grand Opera, sung in English, had arrived as early as 1868 (Mrs. Amelia Neville, an older citizen, thought that "This was an interesting novelty. Italian opera had always before been sung in Italian.") and made a fortune, and a song called "One Fish-Ball" ("We give no bread with o-ne fish-ball") became at the same moment a social senti-

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ment; and in the nineties San Franciscans packed a score of theaters, whether for Coquelin in *Tartuffe,* Ibsen's Nora, or Captain Francis Levison, the villain of Mrs. Wood's *East Lynne.*

San Franciscans also wrote poetry. It was not Bierce, as has been said, who was the poet-missionary or the gauleiter of the local creative impulse. He was responsible for neither the spiritedness of San Francisco's poets nor for their numbers. As early, according to Franklin Walker, as that fateful April morning in 1847 when Mr. Edward C. Kemble's poem, "Blowing up the Winds", appeared in the *California Star,* the poet's corner was sanctified on the front page of all news-sheets, and in the following decades it was continued, in the metropolitan dailies, with respect close to zest. In 1893 Ella Sterling Cummins discovered for purposes of immortality in *The Story of the Files: A Review of California Writers and Literature,* two hundred and forty-one famous men, or not quite five for every year of San Francisco's proper existence.

The literary spirit partook of the general craze for Art and was exuberant. But in attitude and form it was seldom, as Bierce saw, distinctively "Western", and it did not have the excuse of freshness. Its gusto was inescapably conditioned by Riley in Indiana and predirected by Aldrich in Boston and by Tennyson almost—after 1892 literally—from the other side of the grave. Literature had prestige among the citizens and poets were respected, a civic condition that cannot be held to imply dishonor except insofar as it corrupted the poets themselves. But poetry became a matter of social competition, and it was the *Poet,* that restless, hollow-cheeked wanderer in another ether, who was recognized too often as alone legitimate. Thus accumulated that monstrous quantity of dull, derivative, and awkward when not simply absurd poetic exercise which constitutes the burden of the Files. The San Franciscans were not more stupid—quite the contrary—but they were more energetic than other Americans and so they intensified the sin, and the intolerable result was sublimity over-nourished.

The national propaganda for goodness and light was enormous and stifling. What was required was a concerted action toward a new and a more expensive faith, and as its agent a literature willing to flaunt before the wide public the contrary facts of existence, willing to be tough, ugly, antagonistic, shocking. So Hulme

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declared for a new genre and so Ezra Pound, heroically, in 1913 was praying: "If America should bring forth a real pessimist—not a literary pessimist—I should almost believe."

Bierce, by coincidence, in that very year withdrew his efforts. But Bierce had thirty years before—and, what is more, in San Francisco—found strength to stir under the similar but more unrelieved burden and to be, pugnaciously, a pessimist. Just how much of the burden he dislocated it is impossible to say. He made a hostile gesture, when others dared not, and so struck a blow for the sanity of men, and it is in terms of that service that Bierce is important and astonishing.

He was not, after all, Pound or Hulme. Those thirty years worked a difference in the possibility of sophistication, and certain allowances must be made. He had not a sufficient sense of literary history. There is no evidence that he understood in very wide context what he was doing. His objection was intuited, and it existed in individual instances, and it was not subtle. The agent provocateur in the midst of the convention, if he was to be felt at all, could not afford subtlety; and so Bierce, as has often been said, expended unnecessary effort, shot at the mice with a Winchester and put butterflies on the rack. He perceived in practice, with rare accuracy, the weaknesses of a vitiated convention; he was extraordinarily clever; and he was bold. But he was the author of no movement, and he was not the one to stimulate a theory.

He was moreover embarrassingly uneducated—at twenty-five a kind friend introduced him to Shakespeare—and he too apparently lacked the profit of academic training. He never put in order what he knew, and what happens often to self-instructed men happened to him: he dared to rebel against the authorities of the moment, but, despite fury, he could not escape from them. His education acted, for the entire period of his professional life, against his intelligence, and so the standards he spoke from and the visions of truth he saw were often confused and often conspicuously illogical, as inconsistent, no matter how wholesome in attitude, as the persons and prejudices they were to expose. He could on one occasion, submitting to socially authorized Toryism, convict the American socialist of "congenital insurgency" and of rebelling "against pretty nearly everything that takes his attention and enlists his thought, though not many things do," and on an-

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other denounce, and with equal dedication, those who ridiculed socialism for its charitable aims and beshrewed it as a threat to the stability of government—and remain all the while equably unaware of the generality of his own rage. He could denounce alike the "enormous majority" of American newspapers, "conducted by rogues and dunces for dunces and rogues," for their opposition to every attempt at political and social reform and, tranquil to dilemma, the reformers themselves for an absurd belief in reform and the possibility of progress. He could observe, with an aloofness fairly outrageous, that "the man in jail for publication of immoralities is always a socialist" and that socialist newspapers—he usually disliked socialists—had always "a profitable 'line' of indecent advertisements," stand muscularly for the good against all literary obscenity, and finally devastate the prissiness of a women's literature, "the cartilaginous virgins of Miss Mary Wilkins, and the inspired he-prudes of Miss Mary William Dean Howells". He was not one of Emerson's men. He wrote in a tone neither ecstatic nor transcendental and he made some show of logical strenuousness; and so inconsistency in him was a grave fault.

It was a fault which also infected his principles, so far as he had any, of literary production and criticism. His contemporaries existed for him in irritating detail and with remarkable precision he exposed their excesses, but he succumbed in his moments of general aesthetics, and without knowing it, to the very taste he was most engaged in detesting. He fired his comment at those who continued to disseminate an emotional set which, for the purposes of poetry, had been too long codified and which had lost all vitality, but he recanted always before authority, and by applying his insult, which was his method, to the critics of Tennyson and to the contemners of Swinburne, he sought grace. The defect was the more regrettable in that he had many readers—he was the most popular journalist in the West—and because he offered himself and was too often received as infallible in matters of literary judgement. "Pupils," as he delighted to call them, submitted manuscripts by the hundreds and swarmed to him, to give him adulation and to receive his pronouncements—and they heard him proscribe all poetry but that which rhymed exactly, had meter, and dealt with the past, and all novels because the novel

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was dead. There wasn't a line of poetry in *Leaves of Grass,* he told Bailey Millard, and "Out of the Cradle, Endlessly Rocking" was "sentimental twaddle of the worst order".

So he compromised his force. Had he had the proper historical equipment he might have been a very great critic indeed, the herald of a new order, the effective conscience to his generation. As he was, he abused individuals. He dusted the jackets, by his own words, not of folly and vice but of the fools and the vicious, which meant inevitably that his satire was to exist in instances and not in general, and also, incidentally, that its time of direct relevance was to be extremely brief. The fools passed quickly, in the natural way, to utterest oblivion, and while his writings retain verbal pungency, Bierce's volumes seem at the end like nothing so much as monuments in marble to the pigmies. Bierce, moreover, wrote for immediate publication almost every day of his adult life, and therefore much of the work was dull and a considerable part was unfortunately pompous.

But taking it all in one piece, the abuse, though sometimes gross, was frank, fresh, and zestful, and in the tone it took and the insult it dared, it was undeniably bracing. And, in spite of what it must seem today, it was not trivial. The fools, their facades and their fads, cluttered a possible landscape, and so there was reason to oppose the New Woman, the Poet of the Day, bicycling, balls, bloomers, the Bloomer Girl, and William Jennings Bryan—who "a week before the convention of 1896 . . . had never heard of himself":

> . . . upon his natural obscurity was superposed the opacity of a Congressional service that effaced him from the memory of even his faithful dog, and made him immune to dunning. . . . To the dizzy elevation of his candidacy he was hoisted out of the shadow by his own tongue, the longest and liveliest in Christendom. Had he held it—which he could not have done with both hands—there had been no Bryan. His creation was the unstudied act of his own larynx; it said, "Let there be Bryan," and there was Bryan.

And, because they contributed to the same condition, there was cause to afflict the Fourth of July orators, the people who christened ships, the persons who introduced a Congressional bill to make the pansy the national flower—why not a national soup? Bierce proposed—those who glibly idealized death, talked of hero-

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ism and such things as fields of honor. The fools existed, in multitudes, and by aiding history in the good work of disposing of them, Bierce set himself in opposition to the great sins become principle, of softness and insincerity and sentimental absurdity.

The literary fools Bierce persecuted were peace-loving and gentle, most often local offenders like persons named Madge Morris and William Greer Harrison and David Lesser Lezinsky, lost quickly and forever, and others, of wider reputation, were in themselves not more than innocuous. They might well have been permitted to exist. The evil, however, lay in the fact that they were popular, that they were, in a literary setting which demanded adherence, compelled to exist. When one attacked them, one attacked the judgement of society, and so one was justified. "In the world of letters, at least," Bierce offered, "nothing is more intolerable than tolerance." When out of good nature or any other reprehensible motive one commended them or their work or whatever else in letters was false and popular, one "had a hand in the dirty work of debasing the intellectual coin of his country. . . ." It was an illiberal creed to which Bierce gave consistent loyalty, if not consistent insight, but illiberalism had the justification of any purgative.

And Bierce gave good doses. So one morning he confronted a Mr. H. L. who had sent Bierce a manuscript:

> You were not born to write stories. Stories are not true and you are too conscientious to make them seem true, and so mislead your fellow creatures. Try writing sermons, which are all true.

And John Lambie, a poet, he advised with hearty brevity to "try oleating in prose". Madge Morris, who drew tribute from Joaquin Miller and who "harp in hand . . . smote the rebel wire, and lifting up her noise addressed that prodigious dryness," the Colorado Desert, had years of Bierce, and Miller himself, of the hairy-chested prosody and the tom-tom rhythms, alone on his mountain suffered "The Mormon Question", by J-qu-n M-ll-r:

> *I said I will shake myself out of my clothes,*
> *I will roll up my sleeves, I will spit on my hands*
> *(The hands that I kissed to the sun in the lands*
> *To the north, to the east, to the south, and the west*
> *Of every sea that is under the sun,)*

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. . . . . .

And I rose in the strongest strength of my strength
With my breast of brass and my hair's full length,
And I shook myself out of my clothes in the land
Of the Mormons, and stood there and kissed my hand.

And Bierce, democratic in intolerance, slashed class lines and found equally unbearable the queasy tenderness of David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford University, who confessed:

Beyond the sea, I know not where,
There is a town called Viverols;
I know not if 'tis near or far,
I know not what its features are,
I only know 'tis Viverols. . .

and the melancholy of a self-styled radical who had seen:

Oh, Oh, Oh! Beautiful Emma taking a stroll with her beau
Out on the meadow in the moonlight yonder, proving herself untrue,

which for Bierce was an interesting illustration of an anarchist in love, "a spectacle hardly inferior to that of a soaring squid." And then, for a moment, at the end of his career, he noted the national literary situation, "the infantese of the late Eugene Field, the coagulated vulgarity of Mr. James Whitcomb Riley, the impossible nigger lore of Mr. Joel Chandler Harris, the proprietary syntax of Mr. Stephen Crane, the phonetic mephiticisms of Mrs. Amelie Rives Chandler," and "the hill tribe detestables of Miss Mary Murfree. . . ."

These critical explorations were too often merely sarcasm, but in this age of enchantment disrespect was good, and in this context sarcasm implied realities.

So Bierce spelled his uncertain glory, to be able to imply realities, as it was his fate only by occasional accident to achieve them. He had no "ideas". His insights, literary, social, political, moral, were too often and too apparently, as we see it now, stunted in conception by what seem foolish antagonisms. His engagements lacked wisdom and his arguments quite simply lacked intellect. But they masqueraded. They somehow made up for intellect.

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With an energy unaccounted for by mere perversity, by simple petulance, Bierce *delivered* his antagonisms, delivered them with the shock of belligerent, intruding, undeniable truth. It was no small artistic achievement. He brought to the low uses of sarcasm an amazing, even, considering its uses, a too-perfect technique. He sometimes overshot, but when he didn't he brought his sentences to the rare thing, precision. They were dearly wrought and finely balanced and arranged, and they were impenetrable. Any unit larger than the sentence would have exposed him, and he consequently worked too exclusively at it, but with an imagination adapted to chiseling. He mastered it. He reduced it to a tense, subtle finality, and *it* imposed the authority he in himself lacked.

Bierce had learned his style where and as he could, in the boisterous but narrow school of Western journalism, in a short intermediate career in Fleet Street, in unmethodical reading and home-improvement; and he had little idea what he had learned. In fact Bierce brought to his journalism a literary—and by implication a social—ideal greater than ever he knew. He might hold Swinburne up to the admiration of his "pupils" and he might hasten, crushed by the mob, to the throne of Tennyson, but he was all the while, in spite of himself and much more to the necessary point, reading to the same mob the lesson of the Augustans—a lesson to the effect that gardens were to be trimmed, that wings were to be clipped, that poesy had a function more divine than flight, that reality was not a spree. Bierce contradicted the lesson of his own stylistic achievement, but the achievement remained. It interrupted the revels, it suggested truth to the point of brutality, and it confused the enemy.

Bierce paid the price for his inability finally to detect the real truth; he paid to some extent in his critical encounters, where he too frequently just missed or even missed entirely the real general point, never more copiously than in his short stories. Those sixty-five stories, less occasional than his arguments, naturally constitute his memorial—and indeed it is by one or two of them, ubiquitously anthologized, that he is regularly remembered. Their failure, in the Jamesian vocabulary, is that they do not represent; they fail to create and to fulfill the actuality that, paradoxically, they suggest. Ingeniously plotted, they are constrictingly schematic, they are paralyzed by ingenuity. They are compact. They

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are clever—genuinely clever. They are efficient little machines. But they are lifeless, two-dimensional, oppressed with a dialogue all syntax and, in their eternal game of grisly irony, finally monotonous. They make the single claim to art that they reveal a working craft: they have concision and they are well-arranged.

Craft, on the other hand, in a time when it was facility that tended to be honored, had its value—and the stories, for the same reason and despite what they lack, are still admirable. But to Bierce's audience there was something greater: they were, in fact, appalling. They irresistibly asserted themselves because, more than craft, they had boldness, they had the courage even to be offensive. What must seem to us today an obstinate, not to say a deranged concern with war, madness, the menace of the supernatural, literally assaulted the public imagination. To a public for whom beauty was joy and tragedy wistful, the story, *Chickamauga,* of a child, a deaf mute, romping among dying soldiers and screaming at the sight of its murdered parents, had the impact of a blow. The story of the instant of desperate fantasy of an already hanging man, *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,* had the force almost of truth! The story, *A Son of the Gods,* of the gallant young officer whose very courage, excessive and magnetic, provokes a mass slaughter, undermined a public morality. Courage is foolhardy; the hanging man, despite your sentiment and in the nature of things, hangs. These are bearable themes, but they were unexpected. What Bierce precociously revealed was the reader, a reader who hadn't realized the imprisonment of his own romantic inclination; and therein was concealed the shock. It was not realism he committed, but outrage, immediate engagement with a literature and an audience. So he adapts the cheap nostalgia made popular by Riley and Eugene Field to a lyrical tale of parricide; the narrator of *An Imperfect Conflagration* soliloquizes: "Early one June morning in 1872 I murdered my father—an act which made a deep impression on me at the time. This was before my marriage, while I was living with my parents in Wisconsin." So, in the terrible *Oil of Dog,* he perverts the worn and oppressive charm of "Little Orphant Annie" to a story of abortion: "My name is Boffer Bings. I was born of honest parents in one of the humbler walks of life, my father being a manufacturer of dog-oil and my mother having a small studio in the shadow of the village church, where she disposed of unwelcome babes." And so in *The*

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Famous Gilson Bequest—a story which with curious exactness anticipates *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*—the horse-thief Gilson, while exposing the profounder degeneracy of his townsmen, in and out of life remains unrepentingly a thief. With wit real if sometimes mannered, with the good callousness of his intelligence, with skill, Bierce corrupted his contemporaries: death was possible and unlovely when it came; courage is ridiculous; murder and thievery and other activities of the human spirit are evil only according to a hypocritical ethic. The stories were often gratuitously revolting, but, unlike the satin horrors of Poe, they did a job. They drew an indictment. They served; they broke barriers to show possibilities beyond sentimentality.

Finally the superannuated dogma was broken, and Bierce might have had his day. But if by the time Bierce went into Mexico there was some sign of a change in the American temper, it was not because of him and he didn't recognize it. He had had his self-confessed disciples, most notably George Sterling, but none followed in the attitude that made him important, and there is no matter of his influence. He had been given, in his best days, the tribute of much enthusiam, but as his audience was flushed with nothing so much as its own enthusiasms, the tribute was not a great one. Had the tendency of his objection been recognized he would have had neither popularity nor the cultural authority which he was granted, and in fact his career on any but a superficial level was one of profound alienation, a fact he came more and more to realize. He was at the end certainly disappointed; he was the better man and he must have known that the day had gone to the James Whitcomb Rileys and the Thomas Bailey Aldriches, and that he was not to be mourned. And yet—and it is the finest thing to be said of him—he did not submit; he did not bow to easy sentiment or, allowing charity for intellectual contradictions, assume values not his own. He went to unreasonable extremes in vilifying that sentiment and those values and often to an attitude so inflexibly negative that it approached the unreason against which it was conceived. "So," he wrote to Sterling, "—you have my entire philosophy in two words: 'Nothing matters.'" It was not, as Bierce said it, a wise thing to say. But in a culture where so much that was so worthless seemed to matter a great deal, it took courage and a ruthless, acidulous honesty to say it. It was a sentiment shocking to the sentimental mind.

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VERGIL

Ecloga I[1]

MELIBOEUS

Tityre tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi
silvestrem tenui musam meditaris avena,
nos patriae finis et dulcia linquimus arva,
nos patriam fugimus, tu Tityre lentus in umbra
formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas.

TITYRUS

O Meliboee deus nobis haec otia fecit.
namque erit ille mihi semper deus, illius aram
saepe tener nostris ab ovilibus imbuet agnus.
ille meas errare boves ut cernis et ipsum
ludere quae vellem calamo permisit agresti.

MELIBOEUS

Non equidem invideo, miror magis, undique totis
usque adeo turbatur agris. en ipse capellas
protinus aeger ago, hanc etiam vix Tityre duco.
hic inter densas corylos modo namque gemellos,
spem gregis, a silice in nuda conixa reliquit.
saepe malum hoc nobis si mens non laeva fuisset
de caelo tactas memini praedicere quercus.
sed tamen iste deus qui sit da Tityre nobis?

TITYRUS

Urbem quam dicunt Romam Meliboee putavi
stultus ego huic nostrae similem quo saepe solemus
pastores ovium teneros depellere fetus.
sic canibus catulos similes sic matribus haedos
noram sic parvis componere magna solebam.
verum haec tantum alias inter caput extulit urbes
quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.

[1]When lands around Cremona and Mantua were confiscated for veterans of the Civil Wars, Vergil lost his farm. He appealed to Octavian for restitution and it appears that he succeeded. Vergil went on to become the great poet of the Empire and Octavian became Augustus; they were travelling together when Vergil died. It is said that Tityrus in this poem, who pays this early tribute to the "god" Octavian, represents Vergil. Meliboeus, who has been evicted permanently, does not mention the Emperor.

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translated by JOHN THOMPSON JR.

Eclogue I

MELIBOEUS

You to your beech tree, Tityrus, withdraw
And whistle at the Tree Muse through a straw.
I leave my sweet fields, leave my country. This
Is exile, Tityrus. But loaf in the shade!
Pipe until the woods learn what you've played
And echo with your *Amarillis-illis*.

TITYRUS

Oh Meliboeus, a god gave us this peace.
I'll stain his altar with a bloody fleece
And call him *God* a hundred times. You see
My flocks graze by his grace; his grace lets me
Play what I feel like playing on this straw.

MELIBOEUS

I feel no envy, but a sort of awe:
There's trouble all around you. See, I go
Dragging with pain to drive my goats. This doe,
Tityrus, I can scarcely drag along.
Here in the hazel thicket she was wrung
In labor till she dropped her kids, those twins,
The hope of all the flock, on naked flint.
When heaven blasts the oaks to make them signs
I know bad luck is what that lightning augurs
But my left-handed wits passed me no hint.
Well, tell me, Tityrus—this god of yours?

TITYRUS

Meliboeus, I thought the place called Rome
Was like our little city here at home
Where we shepherds drive our weaned Spring lambs.
Pups are just like dogs, kids like their dams,
Small things are much like big ones: so I said.
The others since this one reared up her head
Are topped the way a cypress tops a weed-bed.

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MELIBOEUS

Et quae tanta fuit Romam tibi causa videndi?

TITYRUS

Libertas quae sera tamen respexit inertem
candidior postquam tondenti barba cadebat,
respexit tamen et longo post tempore venit,
postquam nos Amaryllis habet Galatea reliquit.
namque fatebor enim dum me Galatea tenebat
nec spes libertatis erat nec cura peculi.
quamvis multa meis exiret victima saeptis
pinguis et ingratae premeretur caseus urbi
non umquam gravis aere domum mihi dextra redibat.

MELIBOEUS

Mirabar quid maesta deos Amarylli vocares
cui pendere sua patereris in arbore poma,
Tityrus hinc aberat. ipsae te Tityre pinus
ipsi te fontes ipsa haec arbusta vocabant.

TITYRUS

Quid facerem, neque servitio me exire licebat
nec tam praesentis alibi cognoscere divos.
hic illum vidi iuvenem Meliboee quotannis
bis senos cui nostra dies altaria fumant.
hic mihi responsum primus dedit ille petenti:
pascite ut ante boves pueri submittite tauros.

MELIBOEUS

Fortunate senex ergo tua rura manebunt.
et tibi magna satis quamvis lapis omnia nudus
limosoque palus obducat pascua iunco.
non insueta gravis temptabunt pabula fetas
nec mala vicini pecoris contagia laedent.
fortunate senex hic inter flumina nota
et fontis sacros frigus captabis opacum.
hinc tibi quae semper vicino ab limite saepes

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MELIBOEUS

You saw Rome; tell me your great reason why.

TITYRUS

Freedom came late to me. She let me lie
In dullness, never looked, till the dull years
Had taught my beard to grow white for the shears.
Then she came and looked me in the eye.
And Amarillis had me. She let go,
That other, Galatea. Well, you know
How Galatea bitched me. All it meant
Was slavery. I couldn't save a cent.
I'd take my best pressed cheese, tear from my fold
My lambs, the innocents! slaughtered and sold!
And walk home wondering where the money went.

MELIBOEUS

Amarillis, you were gloomy at prayer,
You let the apples rot and didn't care—
I never guessed why. Tityrus had left.
How our pines, springs, orchards howled, bereft!

TITYRUS

What could I do? Stay home and be a slave,
Leave home and lose whatever my gods gave—
Here, Meliboeus, here I saw that youth
Our altars burn for every year twelve days,
Who took my questions, gave me my first truth:
"Feed your cows, boys; breed bulls; keep the old ways."

MELIBOEUS

Lucky old man! Your country still is yours.
And big enough for you, this field of rocks
And muddy rushes—so the swamp assures
Your breeding ewes from pest-rid neighbor flocks
And all temptation of strange nourishment.
Lucky old man, here with the streams you know,
The sacred springs, withdraw to the cool shade.
Here let Hybla's bees in your neighbor's willow

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Hyblaeis apibus florem depasta salicti
saepe levi somnum suadebit inire susurro
hinc alta sub rupe canet frondator ad auras
nec tamen interea raucae tua cura palumbes
nec gemere aeria cessabit turtur ab ulmo.

TITYRUS

Ante leves ergo pascentur in aethere cervi
et freta destituent nudos in litore piscis,
ante pererratis amborum finibus exsul
aut Ararim Parthus bibet aut Germania Tigrim
quam nostro illius labatur pectore voltus.

MELIBOEUS

At nos hinc alii sitientis ibimus Afros
pars Scythiam et rapidum Cretae veniemus Oaxen
et penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos.
en umquam patrios longo post tempore finis
pauperis et tuguri congestum caespite culmen
post aliquot mea regna videns mirabor aristas?
impius haec tam culta novalia miles habebit
barbarus has segetes? en quo discordia civis
produxit miseros, his nos consevimus agros.
insere nunc Meliboee piros pone ordine vitis.
ite meae quondam felix pecus ite capellae.
non ego vos posthac viridi proiectus in antro
dumosa pendere procul de rupe videbo,
carmine nulla canam, non me pascente capellae
florentem cytisum et salices carpetis amaras.

TITYRUS

Hic tamen hanc mecum poteras requiescere noctem
fronde super viridi, sunt nobis mitia poma
castaneae molles et pressi copia lactis,
et iam summa procul villarum culmina fumant
maioresque cadunt altis de montibus umbrae.

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Hedge sipping, forever humming, persuade
You gently, "Go to sleep". Under the high
Rock there the woodsman sings a song to the sky
While your pet pigeons utter squawks of content
And doves still in the airy elm lament.

TITYRUS

And so trembling deer shall graze in the air,
The seas shall strand their fishes on a bone-
Dry coast, and each gone past the other's frontier
Shall Gaul drink Tigris, Parthian drink Saône
Before my heart loses his countenance.

MELIBOEUS

But we must go. Some to reach the torrents
Of Crete's Oaxes, some to the Ukraine,
The thirsty Africans, and some where Britain
Floats cut off entirely from the world.
Ah, years to come, will I ever see again
My country, years and years from now, my old
Shack and its sod roof; will I ever come
To stare at a couple of corn stalks, once my kingdom?
Will some damned soldier hold this land I've plowed,
Foreigners reap these crops? So we are bowed
And broken by disorder. Is this my harvest?
Now, Meliboeus, dress your vine rows, graft
Your pears. Let's go, my goats. I'll never rest
Again beneath some cave's eave while you drift
Away on the distant crags, browsing and slow;
I'll sing no songs; come, my goats, where no
Alfalfa flowers bloom, no bitter willow.

TITYRUS

Well, you might have stayed and made your bed
On green boughs here with me tonight. Chestnuts
And apples all are ripe, the cheese is salted.
Look, the smoke is rising from those huts.
See where the shadows of the mountains spread.

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RALPH RADCLIFFE

Dethe and The Goer by the Waye

Introductory Note

Dethe and The Goer by the Waye is one of the three extant works of Ralph Radcliffe (ca. 1519-1559), the earliest prose plays in the English language. The Ms. of all three works, two dialogues and a morality-play, is at present in the possession of Lord Harlech, who has authorized their transcription from the original and publication. *Dethe and The Goer by the Waye* is here published for the first time. All inconsistencies of spelling, type capitals, and punctuation are retained as in the original.

All three plays were written when Radcliffe was a student at Jesus College, Cambridge. The Ms. itself is calf-bound, embossed with the motto and crest of Henry VIII and dedicated to him. The date of the Ms. is shortly after 1536 when Radcliffe took his degree.

Radcliffe himself is known to us by notices from Bishop Bale, Piteus and Anthony a Woods. Of a Lancashire family, he obtained shortly after 1540 the living of White Friars Priory in Hitchen, Herts. Here he took up the teaching of the children committed to his care, and had a playhouse constructed in the lower part of the Cloister. There "he used to present his agreeable and reputable plays to the public view, so that the boys committed to his charge might overcome the curse of shyness and transform their puerile and stammering utterance into precise, elegant and well-enunciated speech" (Bale, *Illustrium Majoris Brittaniae Scriptorum*). A strong rebel and Protestant, Radcliffe, with Bale, Ascham and Rastell, supported Henry VIII and Cromwell against Rome. He likewise was a rebel in education, strongly opposed to Sir John Cheke and his new pronunciation of Greek and contemporary educational practice: "they went to the Grammar Schole little children: they came from thence great lubbers".

Of Radcliffe's original nineteen works, the three extant pieces are all translations from the Latin manuscripts of Ravisius Textor (1470-1521) who wrote them for his students at the Collège de Navarre. *Dethe and The Goer by the Waye* is in all likelihood

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the earliest version of "Everyman" in the English language. I cannot support this statement here, but anyone interested can easily compare the two plays for their similarity. It may also be noticed that of the two plays, Radcliffe's is the stronger and more forceful in its language. I am happy, in any case, that Radcliffe's work may at last speak for itself.

LYNETTE ROBERTS

Two personages aure broght in. dethe, and the goer by the waye.
dethe. stande thou straunger.
The goer by ye waye. who art thou?
dethe. dethe, the laste lyne of all thynges. stande.
The goer by ye waye. Wherfor shall I stande?
dethe. It is lefull.
The goer by the waye. is it so necessarye that I stande?
dethe. so I byd.
The goer by the waye. what wolde you?
dethe. depryve the frayle bodye of lyfe.
The goer by the waye. what is the cause?
dethe. The sister of destinye lachesis hath wonde up hyr thredys.
The goer by the waye. why is my hower so shorte.
dethe. a short tyme dothe go awaye quycklye.
The goer by the waye. why do yov go alone?
dethe. for I suffre no men to lyve wyth me.
The goer by the waye. wherfor be yor sensys without lyght?
dethe. lesse I shuld se, who, I stryke.
The goer by the waye. who do you take al men?
dethe. I have no choyse.
The goer by the waye. why doth yor face seme ferfull?
dethe. lesst that I be knowen afor the laste daye.
The goer by the waye. who do you bere a scythe?
dethe. I mowe with this, the slip(e)ry sedes of mannes lyfe.
The goer by the waye. who do yov bere a boe?
dethe. that I may stryke noble kynges by wayes vnknowen.
The goer by the waye. why haste thou wayghtys of evyn balances?
dethe. for I am callyd ryghtuouse vnto all people.
The goer by the waye. do you kyll wyse men?
dethe. Salomon is deed.

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The goer by the waye. do you kyll the louers of battell?
dethe. hector is deed.
The goer by the waye. Are not the ryche redemyd for goodys?
dethe. Ryches coulde not take kyng Cresus from me.
The goer by the waye. doth not boldnes, not goys wyth a blynde countenance, delyuer men?
dethe. Typsis of Thessalys is ouerwhelmyd with his plentyful felde. swyfte Jason is deed, by whom the praye was taken awaye from the dragon caste in to a slepe.
The goer by the waye. doth not grauyte help?
dethe. The Catones be deed
The goer by the waye. dothe no religyon?
dethe. The servande of God hath dyed.
The goer by the waye. wether dothe anye strenght help?
dethe. Thou noble Samson was slayne?
The goer by the waye. what? doth not virginyte help?
dethe. The chaste virgyn penelope is wasted.
The goer by the waye. why do you stryke us with so sodeyn a stroke?
dethe. The tyme is spent which fortune gave you.
The goer by the waye. I am not yet trublyd wyth age.
dethe. No age dothe wythstande vs.
The goer by the waye. wyl you kyll wyth yor hatchet me a younge man?
dethe. I kyll the younge wyth the olde.
The goer by the waye. Refreyn yor angre.
dethe. destinyes do wythstande.
The goer by the waye. Can I not be redemyd by holynes?
dethe. holynes doth not stande agenst dethe.
The goer by the waye. shall not marcys make a slowe destinye?
dethe. Nother marcys dothe dryve awaye dethe.
The goer by the waye. if I shulde gyve the monye?
dethe. monye can not turn me.
The goer by the waye. if I pray vnto the?
dethe. I am not moved wyth gentil prayer.
The goer by the waye. what if I wolde stryve wyth the?
dethe. Thou maye stryve.
The goer by the waye. Wyl you be ouercomed wyth anye power of wepynnes?

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dethe. I am not ouercomed wyth wepynes
The goer by the waye. but whye do yov kyll so manye poeple?
dethe. The systers of destinye wol de not that they lyve.
The goer by the waye. why doste thou kyll so manye people wyth a wylde scythe?
dethe. manye yeoperdys of destinys be vndre me.
The goer by the waye. do you rule in water?
dethe. I have drouned manys shipmen in the wawys of the see.
The goer by the waye. what ieoperdye haste thou on standyng waters?
dethe. I have Myrmaides.
The goer by the waye. what do they?
dethe. They cause the shipmen to slepe with their swete songe, so the shyp that wantyd a watching shipman is drounyd in the water.
The goer by the waye. what? so yov rule in cyties?
dethe. here I have chydyng.
The goer by the waye. what do they?
dethe. fyghtynges be made.
The goer by the waye. What? so yov dwell in woddes?
dethe. A wodde is mete for thevys.
The goer by the waye. wherfor dothe this praye serve?
dethe. It causeth manslawghter vnto us, and kyllith a straunger with a drawen swearde.
The goer by the waye. what landes do you inhabyte?
dethe. A certain house is gevyn me vnto doubtfull dethe.
The goer by the waye. Tel me, can no excuse ouercome the?
dethe. thou canste not ouercome dethe, no man dyd overcome it. but wether goys thou, wether dothe the waye lede the goyng?
The goer by the waye. I can not tel wether I shuld go.
dethe. wether thynkes thou to lyve alwaye?
The goer by the waye. I thynke not.
dethe. Then what Jorney wyl thou take?
The goer by the waye. I wyl go to God.
dethe. do you attempt to go vnto hevyn?
The goer by the waye. forsoth I do attempt.
dethe. wether do you seke to take yor yorney?
The goer by the waye. my mynde can not tel.
dethe. do not I kepe the fressheholdes of paradyse?

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The goer by the waye. Thou doste not kepe them.
dethe. bicause the haule of hevyn is neuer open but that thou be deed before, take the woondes of dethe.
The goer by the waye. what? is it laufull for my to dye?
dethe. it is laufull to dye by destinye. therfor thou muste dye.
The goer by the waye. Graunt me lyfe a litil whyle.
dethe. Thou muste gyve shortly the laste wordes of thy laste speache.
The goer by the waye. O the chefe God, vndre whom the erth is, whom the starrys do prayse. which rulys the worlde at thy commaundment and the wawes of the see, redeme a mortall straunger from the denne of the pryson in hell. The destinyes do denye me a longer verse.
dethe. Thou muste dye. for I am compellyd to compasse they throte wyth my swearde.

the Ende.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Conrad and the Terms of Modern Criticism

THE CRITICAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF OUR TIME—those achievements which extend and redefine the canon of enduring criticism—made breathing room for themselves by clearing out the exhausted categories of Victorian ethicalism, ninetyish purple-patchery, and Bloomsbury impressionizing. The job may have been done impolitely; but it had to be done. The literary criticism of the past thirty years has succeeded, whatever its manners, in turning the reader's attention from gossip to analysis; from the critic to the author; from the author's laundry bills to his choice of techniques; from the work as a reflection or evasion of life and the world to the work as a made object discontinuous with, but analogous to, life and the world.

Every fresh criticism is a reëmphasis of neglected facts: principles, details, relations. Once, however, the critic has persuaded himself of the acceptability of his work, once he has become respectable, he is likely to forget, and by his authority to compel others to forget, that what he has rescued may not be all there is; that indeed any critical reëmphasis, having subordinated minor ideas and disposed of dead ones, may in its turn strain and expand into an overemphasis that will seem as grotesque to our successors as, say, Rymer's "correctness" (when applied to Shakespeare, for example) seems to us.

One fact that our own self-confident age of criticism has justly reëmphasized is the awareness, the trained skill, of the artist: we are assured that he is a conscious craftsman, expertly familiar with his materials, competent—above all—to select and relate them into calculated effects. Now this truism has never been wholly rejected (though in the nineteenth century especially, even here and there in the twentieth, it has been held in contempt as a mechanic's notion of art); and, qualifying it discreetly at need, mindful of its strength against the not merely popular notions of art as a kind of lunacy or at best as an irresponsible outburst, we may be gratified by the virtual unanimity with which it is being reaffirmed. Yet if it is useful it is also, in certain constricted overconfident uses that have been made of it, dangerous; and these uses, moreover, seem to possess an irresistible appeal for critics who have uncritically adopted the terminology of modern criticism.

How does the critic set about discovering and evaluating the effects that the writer is aiming at? The piety at present undetachable from such terms as myth, tone, image, metaphor, symbol testifies to an accomplished revolution, of terminology at least: in the criticism of lyric and dramatic poetry, this assumption of power has been unchallenged for over two decades; in the

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criticism of fiction, the enforced succession has been more reluctant, doubtless because of the relative unwieldiness of fiction, but there too the terms are already sanctified. We have agreed, then, to assume that these terms name and direct, if not ways of seeing, at least ways of consciously and usefully classifying, the effects that the writer—more or less consciously, premeditatedly, even overtly—is aiming at, and that are in the end a single effect: to project by detail and pattern what seems an epitome of some aspect of the human condition; an analogue of life as difficult as life and yet with a final convincing coherence that life itself is too large and perhaps too planless to offer to our understanding.

Still, it turns out that the terms, whatever their relevance and propriety in the abstract, may in practice become—like any other fashionable and striking critical term—conjuring words, hobby-horses, excuses for inadequate observation, vindications of imperfect judgment, or even muses inspiring the kind of criticism which is a narcissistic little poem of its own. Contemporary examinations of image and metaphor are abundant and of an unprecedented thoroughness; but liable to prefer, by implication, the spectacular (and therefore readily discussable) to the unobtrusively exact: Donne's figures, for example, have been analyzed in scores of excellent or merely self-congratulatory critiques,[1] while Chaucer's rest serenely intact in the amniotic fluid of scholarship. Tone is another term that seems to have had careful treatment and illustration; yet our first impression fades before the fact: it is not so much tone as a single species of tone—irony—that has been isolated with any care, and even irony has been examined for the most part in its showier manifestations—again, representatively, Donne's, not Chaucer's. As for myth and symbol, each has furnished its adherents with a career: the mythicist seems usually content to certify a work by documenting its faithfulness to Jung, the symbol-monger dotes on large, repetitive images heavy with a sense of fatality and futility; but neither is very strenuous at demonstrating, in the text itself, the relevance and propriety of his pet idea to the author's effects (or failures) of substantiality, and total design.

Having frequently cheapened the valuable terms they have helped make current, many of our critics, especially in the literal-minded second generation of modern criticism, have proceeded to cheapen the crucially valid notion of the artist as craftsman. Mistaking their own emphasis for the entire work, they have tended to find the author's fulfillment not in a totally designed structure whose simplest and most conventional appearance is an aspect, and conditions every other aspect, of its being, but in a disingenuous treasure of hints and clues, shrewdly buried by the author beneath the misleading or

[1]Mr. Eliot, it may be provocative to note at this point, has characterized the Donne of the sermons—those much admired, highly figured "prose-poems"—as the Billy Sunday of English divines ("Lancelot Andrewes", *Selected Essays*, Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1950, p. 302).

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innocuous surface, to be as shrewdly dug up and displayed by the critic in proof of his own matching adeptness: nose to nose, critic confronts writer and, astonished, discovers himself.

The best writer is, then, the writer most prolific in modish clues of myth, metaphor, symbol, *etc.* throughout his eventless and uncharactered story. The outmoded terms recede into harmless disuse: plot gives way to myth; character and incident are neither elaborated nor confirmed, they are replaced, or at least submerged, by metaphor and symbol; and, emancipated from the perplexities of a transparent style and a frighteningly recognizable world (consider Herbert Read's bewildered rejection of Jane Austen[2]), the critic turns gratefully to those writers who seem to have anticipated what he is looking for.

One of the chosen is Conrad—"not . . . a man who merely tells a tale," says Morton Dauwen Zabel, "but . . . a poet in fiction"[3]; "a philosophical novelist," says Robert Penn Warren, "willing to go naked into the pit, again and again, to make the same old struggle for his truth"[4]—and Conrad is an especially instructive example because admiration of his meretricious effects tends to divert attention from his genuine gifts: he is, when he declines to unclothe himself for the purpose Mr. Warren prescribes, a first-rate story-teller—perhaps the best in English since Smollett—and a master of solidly accurate descriptive prose (of which the storm episode in *The Nigger of the Narcissus* is only one of many superb instances). There is, nevertheless, in Conrad a persistent self-dramatizing and sentimentalizing impulse, at the root of his well publicized "aristocratic aloofness": he will without scruple betray his entertaining narrative and his rather unsubtly contrasted characters at the appeal of any portentous image or generalization or symbolic gesture, often wholly impertinent, and liable, if not in fact calculated, to forestall criticism by flattering the up-to-date reader that he is in touch with subterranean truths far more profound than any mere representation of character and relationship. Overpowered, the narrative becomes a contrived exemplum, and the characters bogus-heroic gestures or dispensable emblems, of the author's foggy self-sustaining metaphysic.[5]

Victory is one of Conrad's typical failures of this sort (it will not be con-

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[2]*English Prose Style*, London, 1932.

[3]Editor's Introduction, *The Portable Conrad*, Viking, New York, 1950, p. 45.

[4]Conrad, *Nostromo*, Modern Library, New York, 1951, xxxviii.

[5]F. R. Leavis has called attention to Conrad's efforts, particularly in *Heart of Darkness*, "to impose . . . a 'significance' that is merely an emotional insistence on the presence of what he can't produce" ("Joseph Conrad: Minor Works and *Nostromo*", in *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction 1920-1951*, sel. John W. Aldridge, Ronald Press, New York, 1952, p. 111); and he offers his own unimpeachable examples. But, valuing Conrad very highly indeed, Dr. Leavis regards the defect as a minor one, not as the chronic and radical defect it may appear to others; and his own critical purposes give him no occasion to explain why several respected critics of our time have painstakingly explicated this compulsory "significance", why they have been quite taken in by what should be plainly visible as the butcher's thumb on the scales.

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clusive, but it may at least start a discussion, to note the reduction of almost every character to a single symbol and function—the cardboard elder Heyst being only the most obtrusive example—and the maze of outrageous coincidences through which the story is made to emerge in Conrad's "philosophy" and to provide a catastrophe); and *Typhoon* and *The Nigger of the Narcissus,* among his long fictions, make perhaps the strongest claim to the virtue of minding their business, of proportioning their imagery to the characters and events—in part, no doubt, because their subjects are more severely limited than is customary with Conrad and because their themes require a closer involvement in the live details of life at sea. The Conradian contrivance and bathos are clear enough, however, and more briefly examinable, in two of his most celebrated pieces of short fiction: "The Secret Sharer" and "Amy Foster".

"Amy Foster" contains one of Conrad's solemn, ruminative, above all experienced pipe-smoking narrators, unqualifiedly to be trusted, whose every word and motion, weighted with some meaning or other, hold the listener—and presumably the reader—in awed silence. The archetype is Marlow in *Heart of Darkness,* and here is a sample of Conrad's catch-all symbolism in presenting him:

> ". . . I couldn't have felt more of lonely desolation somehow, had I been robbed of a belief or had missed my destiny in life. . . . Why do you sigh in this beastly way, somebody? Absurd? Well, absurd. Good Lord! mustn't a man ever— Here, give me some tobacco." . . .
>
> There was a pause of profound stillness, then a match flared, and Marlow's lean face appeared, worn, hollow, with downward folds and dropped eyelids, with an aspect of concentrated attention; and as he took vigorous draws at his pipe, it seemed to retreat and advance out of the night in the regular flicker of the tiny flame. The match went out.

Apart from the author's rib-cracking nudges at us with his light-and-dark symbolism, this is Sherlock Holmes, that bundle of bogus-heroic gestures, mesmerizing a party of Watsons by the mere fact of his existence. Dr. Kennedy, in "Amy Foster", differs from Marlow only in profession; he too is supposed to unman the reader by the force of his presence, and he is impelled by the same urge to generalize, with the aid of the vaguest and most pretentious images, on anything whatever. Having introduced an "old affair, scandalous enough to serve as a motive for a Greek tragedy", the doctor goes on to instruct his friend that

> ". . . There are other tragedies less scandalous and of a subtler poignancy, arising from irreconcilable differences and from that fear of the Incomprehensible that hangs over all our heads—over all our heads. . . ."
>
> The tired chestnut dropped into a walk; and the rim of the sun, all red in a speckless sky, touched familiarly the smooth top of a plowed

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> rise near the road as I had seen it times innumerable touch the distant horizon of the sea. The uniform brownness of the harrowed field glowed with a rose tinge, as though the powdered clods had sweated out in minute pearls of blood the toil of uncounted plowmen. From the edge of a copse a wagon with two horses was rolling gently along the ridge. Raised above our heads upon the skyline, it loomed up against the red sun, triumphantly big, enormous, like a chariot of giants drawn by two slow-stepping steeds of legendary proportions. And the clumsy figure of the man plodding at the head of the leading horse projected itself on the background of the Infinite with a heroic uncouthness. The end of his carter's whip quivered high up in the blue. Kennedy discoursed.

This long parenthesis of scene-painting exists, of course, to set up in the reader a vibration to the "infinite" and "universal" implications of the story (before it has been told); to justify, by a context of facile immensities, the doctor's undocumented big words and big ideas; but we do not yet have, and shall not get, a story which in solidity of detail and in scope of characterization can sustain any such imputation of largeness and universality. What we are, in short, getting is "poetry" (from Mr. Zabel's "poet in fiction"), or rather movie music from the woodwinds: Dr. Kennedy pauses to let the universe, paying its respects, furnish the atmosphere—these gassily lyric large back-to-the-farm images—for his unqualifiable wisdom.

Conrad, and the doctor (Conrad's famous manipulation of point of view consists not infrequently in his providing himself with an identical twin named Marlow or Kennedy), make much of the words "mystery" and "truth". We are informed that "there is a particle of a general truth in every mystery"; and that, as for Amy's imagination, "How . . . [it] came to her . . . is an inscrutable mystery". To proclaim mystery, inscrutable or otherwise, is easy; to persuade us to suspend our disbelief in it—except as a pseudo-metaphysical indulgence—the author may reasonably be required to circumscribe it by fact and detail as closely as possible, if only to help us in estimating its magnitude. The mystery invoked in "Amy Foster", however, evaporates untested into pathos and obscurity, the obscurer the better: "From that moment he is plainly in the toils of his obscure and touching destiny." Amy herself remains only a vacant *ewig-weibliche* symbol waiting and watching "far from within the dark kitchen" (an image pointlessly salient, except for jubilant Freudians, in its immediate context of straightforward narrative); Yanko's mindless pathos collapses under the slightest hint of the tragic that Conrad keeps trying to import; and the relationship of Amy and Yanko is explicable in terms lamentably less high-flown and more earthy than Conrad seems capable of imagining, it is in fact not, as Conrad presents it, mysterious at all, but only anecdotally interesting, rather like a "true story" whose interest depends on its being true. The mystery is that Conrad loads his little anecdote with such disproportionate, resolutely tasteless rhetoric.

Imagination is another big idea that Conrad enjoys brooding over. Kennedy

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mentions "the inertness of . . . [Amy's]mind—an inertness that one would think made it everlastingly safe from all the surprises of imagination. And yet which of us is safe?" We learn also, without astonishment, that "there is no kindness of heart without . . . imagination." Toward the end, imagination defers to destiny in that sort of overt bargain-basement fatalism with which Conrad delights in adorning his narrative: ". . . he appeared to have grown less springy of step, heavier in body, less keen of eye. Imagination, no doubt; but it seems to me now as if the net of fate had been drawn closer round him already." What survives of the narrative is precisely nothing: it has sunk under the burden of a moral and metaphysical significance which Conrad's stagey gestures and inflated tropes are forcing on it, and which its characters and relationships are not nearly substantial and complex enough to bear. Mystery, tragedy, truth, imagination, fate, the Incomprehensible and the Infinite—the luxurious opacities are asserted and insisted on; but none of them is earned or penetrated during the action. Conrad avoids only the appropriate word, which is melodrama.

"The Secret Sharer" promises more than "Amy Foster": it is, at least in outline, a genuine story, not—like the latter—an embroidered anecdote; its suspense is inherent, not imposed by pauses during which the narrator lights his pipe, scratches behind his left ear, or glumly contemplates the mysterious, fateful, tragic, inscrutable, incomprehensible Infinite; it is grounded in the details of life at sea—Conrad's only element, in spite of his angry disclaimers—and it occurs during a decisive moment of that life.

But it has other qualities as well. Summing up post-Jungian critical opinion of one of the "half dozen greatest short novels in the English language", Albert Guérard, Jr. points out that it "exploit[s] the ancient myth or archetypal experience of the 'night journey', of a provisional descent into the primitive and unconscious sources of being"; what we find, if by his advice we reread it as carefully as he has done, is that "the purely adventurous story of rescue and escape has become a psychological and symbolic story of self-exploration, self-recognition, and self-mastery. We find that Leggatt, however real his physical presence, is also the captain's ghostly 'double' or twin. What does this unreflective and immediate sympathy for a 'double' mean but sympathy for one's second, irrational self?"[6] *etc.*

What indeed? Who could fail to predict every item of the depth-psychology paraphernalia that will tidily turn up? And who could possibly miss, on the most inattentive first reading, Conrad's oversimplified, imposed mythical structure, symbol to character in the crudest one-to-one relationship, nailed into the flesh of the narrative in almost every sentence? Mr. Guérard thinks that we may be unaware of Leggatt's function as the captain-narrator's "ghostly 'double' ". Here are some phrases of the captain's, taken at random

[6]Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Secret Sharer*, Signet, New York, 1950, p. 10.

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from the story, describing Leggatt: "like my double", "My sleeping suit was just right for his size", "as though I had been faced by my own reflection in the depths of a somber and immense mirror", "murmured my double" (all these on a single page); "as though I were myself inside that other sleeping suit"; "My double"; "we, the two strangers in the ship, faced each other in identical attitudes"; "he must have looked exactly as I used to look in that bed"; "I felt dual more than ever"; "the dual working of my mind"; "I was constantly watching myself, my secret self"; "Anybody would have taken him for me"; "we two bent our dark heads"; "my second self"; "I had a back view of my very own self"; "My double". Noteworthy also is the emphasis on popular-priced psychoanalytic terms like "secret", "depths", "inside", "back view", "dark", "sleeping suit", "bed", by means of which Conrad—not only anticipating psychoanalysis but showing how to vulgarize it—makes his "myth" clear: perhaps destructively clear, for by the time we have given our energy to relating such coarse, obvious, and superabundant clues at the neatly systematic clinical level proper to them—the interest of myth reduced to the interest of the murder "mystery"—we have lost interest and faith in the narrative itself. If "The Secret Sharer" proves that Conrad is one of the many artist-precursors of depth psychology (we need only turn to the vigorous substantial particulars of Dostoievsky to see how such a precursor can be also, and primarily, an artist), what Conrad offers us here is not even a convincing case history: the captain-patient is too conscious of the symbols—or rather symptoms—that the artist-doctor would like him to exhibit. Conrad might have done better, clinically as well as artistically, if he had been describable by his critical partisans not as a poet in fiction, but as a man who merely tells a tale.

A writer is not responsible for the defects of his admirers; but it is perhaps some sort of judgment on Conrad that he has inspired so much criticism which must be filed under the phony-poetic, and of which the following effusion is representative: " 'The Secret Sharer' is a double allegory. It is an allegory of man's moral conscience, and it is an allegory of man's esthetic conscience. The form of 'The Secret Sharer', to diagram it, is the form of the capital letter L—the very form of the captain's room. (It is hinted at, again, in the initial letter of Leggatt's name.) One part of the letter L diagrams the allegory of the captain's divided soul, man in moral isolation and spiritual disunity. The other part of the letter represents the allegory of the artist's split soul ('the man who suffers and the mind which creates'). The captain stands at the angle of the two isolations and the two searches for selfhood. 'Such was my scheme,' says the captain, 'for keeping my second self invisible.' "[7] On all of

[7] R. W. Stallman, "Life, Art, and 'The Secret Sharer' ", in *Forms of Modern Fiction*, ed. William Van O'Connor, Minneapolis, 1948, p. 241. For an even riper instance of the critic as preening phony-poet, the reader is directed in Mr. Stallman's essay to the three paragraphs beginning "Art is an aquarium" (pp. 234-6).

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which C. H. Rickword, anticipating this deluge by twenty years, made the most charitable comment: ". . . the judgment of 'values' arrived at through a consideration of the symbolic aspect of character is unreliable because of the danger, almost the certainty, that attention will be diverted from the symbol to what it may be guessed to symbolize, which, if the artist is incompetent and the critic hospitable and sympathetic, will be much. It is for no other reason than that Conrad's heroes have been discerned by many earnest people to stand for something really tremendous in the matter of soul, that that writer has been so overestimated."[8]

The mythic and symbolic approach to Conrad is an example, and a representative one, of recent practice in the criticism of fiction. The problem attending this approach is also representative, beyond any single author: it is not that our fashionable (yet useful, indeed indispensable) critical terms compel an overvaluing of Conrad, but that in their claim to systematized usefulness, in their specious completeness, above all in their snowballing authority with critics understandably anxious to substitute categories for an active and disciplined taste, they may get in the way of our seeing any author except as a more or less skilful manipulator of disparate, thrillingly suggestive words.

We can, in fact, profitably stop here at words, and not go on to examine those word-patterns we have, at least till recently, agreed to call characters and events. Henry James once remarked on that "odd law by which the minimum of valid suggestion always serves the man [and, we may add, the *reader*] of imagination better than the maximum". Mr. Zabel, in his appreciation of Conrad, recalls it to us in passing; but it is a law that modern criticism—of Conrad and others—would do well, not casually to recollect, but, in justice to its unfashionable relevance, conscientiously to apply.

[8] "A Note on Fiction", in *Forms of Modern Fiction*, p. 296.

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GEOFFREY WAGNER

The Minority Writer in England

IT IS NOT HARD TO DISCUSS THE MINORITY WRITER in England since he no longer exists. *The Author,* organ of the Society of Authors, has shown that clearly enough, in a special supplement designed to lobby M.P.'s into alleviating the burden of taxation on British writers. By the minority writer *The Author* refers to "the author—poet or novelist—whose work, though highly regarded by competent critics, contains innovations in attitude or expression that prevent its being widely or immediately popular."

1952 was a record book year for Britain. A total of 18,741 titles was issued. In 1953 the total was very similar, dropping by 484 titles. In 1953, however, 120 more novels were published in Great Britain than in 1952, bringing the number of fiction titles to 4,301 for the year (this is nearly two thousand more than in the U. S. A.). The record for fiction, incidentally, is over 5,000 in 1937 but, as C.P. Snow has argued, before the war there were such things as professional novelists, i.e. writers living in Great Britain "from novels alone". Today, in a country of fifty millions, Snow estimates that there are probably a hundred or so novelists attaining an income of £750 in this way, an income equal to that of the average manual laborer in England and thus constituting a "professional class" income. Most miners receive (deservedly) much more. I worked out that, allowing for reprints, limited editions, mysteries, and translations, about fifty novels a week are passing over reviewers' desks in England. An average of two authors are living off these novels, their incomes probably supplemented by literary journalism, sometimes of the crassest kind.

But apart from the large group of small-sale fiction, the big jumps in selling groups in the British lists have been "Chemistry and Physics", "Engineering, Electricity and Mechanics", "Medical and Surgical", and "Technical Handbooks". What emerges from the latest breakdowns of book sales in England is that the new classes given money by the socialist revolution have not yet, for various reasons, become interested in creative literature. What the new middle class in England really want is to take home a book on electronics, or on how to tinker with the car Sundays. The old professional class, comprising doctors, lawyers, and the like, have been, and are being, deprived of money. I am not arguing as to whether this is right or wrong, but in analyzing the plight of the minority writer in England one has to admit that the present (perhaps interim) condition of the socialist experiment is hitting him hard. The lawyer-doctor class consisted of men largely educated by the Arts degree. The new middle-class technical group have not—yet—had their chance to develop these interests (the whole school system, of course, is involved in this).

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Geoffrey Faber, writing recently in *The Spectator*, pleads that the private individual buyer still buys most books in England. Even if this is so, I maintain that the private book-buying money has changed hands in England—*vide* the large recent growth of "Technical Handbooks" in the title list. And the quick expansion of public libraries recently, as well as of the commercial libraries (Times Book Club, Harrods, Boots), together with the overall drop in sales, suggest more that the real buying and reading in England is being done in the library. One out of every four of the population, according to the Library Association, now reads this way in England, and the standard of commercial library fiction is anything but encouraging: meanwhile, as for the bookstores, even *The Author* writes, "The great failure of many booksellers in the last half-century has been their inability to present their shops to the mass of the people as other than middle-class preserves."

If we are to believe Michael Joseph, novelists during the war could "count on" a sale of 10,000. In 1938, *The Author* adds, a young novelist without dependents could live in London on £4 ($11.20) a week, including a dinner in Soho and a visit to the current movies and theaters. Today the situation is roughly this: Mr. Smythe-Jones has a novel accepted and receives an advance of £50 ($140) from his London publisher. This is all most British novelists ever see. In fact an increase of the agreement by subvention is currently reported from England, even in the field of the novel.

Say, however, Smythe-Jones sells 5,000 copies—a fabulous sale for an early novel in England today—because of the low rate on Empire and Dominion sales, he will probably make at a ten per cent royalty something in the nature of £200 ($560) from home and overseas sales. On this he will have to pay about 40 percent in income tax. He is thus left with about £120, or seventy more than his advance, a total of some $336. If he has any American sales, the Treasury deducts a third before taxation. The publisher, meanwhile, breaks even despite the rise in printing costs on about 2,000 and so has made money. The only way to beat this is to write more novels! So we find John Pudney recently publishing three novels a year in England. Not one of these could find an American publisher.

As for the short story, the story magazine era in England was the nineteen twenties; in America the market for stories on a popular level still exists, indeed flourishes. But the popular story market that supported writers of the order of Maugham and Conan Doyle throughout the twenties in England has virtually closed down. In 1918 there were more than twenty magazines, like *Strand* and *Argosy*, all taking stories of this sort. Today *Argosy* and *Blackwood's* are the only survivors of their period, and *Blackwood's*, perhaps for obvious social reasons, only sells 17,858 a month and is steadily losing circulation. It is true that the latest report by *The Financial Times* did note a supposed increase in the demand for short stories. *Lilliput's* recent rise of 22,470 a month was attributed to the introduction of a long short story each issue. Again, some like to think

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that the story-reading public in England has become somewhat more discriminating and would not today tolerate so clumsy a craftsman as Maugham. It is safe to say that the modern British miscellany, like *The Cornhill,* publishes a better story than did the average *Strand* of the twenties, but the job it is meant to be doing is printing a British equivalent of the story to be found in, say, *The Kenyon Review.* And this I am afraid it is only too obvious it is not doing.

I cannot help feeling that the reason for this overall decline in British short fiction is that the magazine reading public is given no chance to sort itself out in England, to stratify its tastes as here. In America you find fairly rigidly divided groups reading the short story—indeed, so rigidly divided that Walter Allen and Elmer Rice call them "industrialized". We all know that those who read *Collier's* or *The Saturday Evening Post* are unlikely to subscribe to *The Partisan Review,* where they might stumble on someone like Jean Genet. It is even said that Greenwich Village highbrows are ashamed if surprised reading a copy of *The New Yorker.*

In England the whole story audience tends to be far more monogenic. And the general level is pretty much that of our popular magazines; when MacNiece's *Trimalchio's Feast* was recently broadcast the B.B.C. had breathlessly to warn its audience in advance that parts of the work dealt wih homosexuality. Of course, there is the same special sale of women's magazines in their millions as there is here. *Woman, Woman's Own,* and *Woman's Weekly,* have all announced substantial gains lately; and *Woman* itself has a circulation of 2,837,044. But the very fact that an editor of one of these magazines recently entered into a spirited defense of women's magazine fiction in *The New Statesman and Nation* shows how wide the net of even these periodicals is cast. One can hardly imagine the editor of *The Saturday Evening Post* bothering to write more than once to *The Nation,* or *The New Republic,* in defense of popular short stories. Even *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's* print a totally different sort of short story from the so-called "slicks" and are far bolder in what they give their readers in this way than *The Adelphi* or *The Cornhill* (at its most skittish). But in England the woman's story shades off into the *Lilliput* or *London Opinion* story, which in turn shades off into *The Cornhill* or *World Review* or *The Adelphi* story. I can see nothing to exclude most of the recent stories published in *The Cornhill* from being printed in *Housewife.* That there is nothing here to disturb the heartbeat of a flea is seen from a glance at *John O'London's Weekly,* the British counterpart of our *Saturday Review* which yet makes that journal seem long-hair.

Now I am by no means one to despise the mass fiction media. But what happens in England is a wide merging and flattening of the periodical audience until you get that situation so well reported by Geoffrey Rans in THE HUDSON REVIEW not long ago—an overall dilapidation of taste, a general levelling of the whole fiction market down to the average Boots Library subscriber (in harmony with the knighting of a film director who gives a mild *frisson* to the

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provincial British Mom). Just how far this spirit of compromise has taken British letters is well evinced by a writer in *The Author* recently criticizing certain "morbidly independent" novelists!

No vitality is left in the British short story today. Periodic forays into the field, made by men like Joyce Cary and H. E. Bates, only prove this point. Was a single one of Frank O'Connor's recent Knopf collection of twenty-seven short stories first published in a British magazine? It was not—although in this country not only *The New Yorker,* but also *Today's Woman,* could find space for samples. (In the same way *Mademoiselle* published Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood,* which would have been far too "daring" for *The Cornhill.*) There is no form of patronage at all for the minority writer in England today, no university presses sponsoring serious publication, so that any attempt to try to rise above the general level of competent mediocrity simply cannot collect an audience. *Horizon* ended up with more American than British subscribers, and Cyril Connolly has told us how in the last year of publication he could only secure *one* new reader from the whole of the North of England. And heaven knows that *Horizon* was middlebrow enough, animated, as Connolly confessed, in part by "the straightforward desire to please without which any magazine must founder". But must it? *New World Writing* makes no "straightforward desire to please" and yet finds a quarter of a million or so provincial American readers ready to buy each issue.

First *Life and Letters* went, *Polemic* and *Horizon* followed, then *World Review* (a mild enough miscellany in all conscience, and backed by the rich Hulton group), and now *Scrutiny* has gone. *Nine* remains, but did not publish at all in 1953, and *Nimbus* remains (?). *Twentieth Century,* which also continues, is to my mind one of the more lively monthly miscellanies from the political point of view, but its literary criticism is unfortunately characteristic of that class of Englishmen of whom Matthew Arnold wrote, "For thinking they have no great turn." Look up "The Last of George Orwell" by John Wain, the white hope of the Third Program, and instead of a sharp and vital critical article, what do we find? A meek and woolly review such as no American little magazine editor would have allowed in print. *Essays in Criticism,* edited by a perspicacious scholar, carries some good critical pieces, however, and now that *Scrutiny* is defunct will incorporate hard-hitting reviews. These, I fear, are sadly needed if English writers are to raise their standards (see in this connection Donald Davie's "Is There a London Literary Racket?" in last June's *Twentieth Century* and the I-Want-To-Be-Loved letter from Spender which was printed in the subsequent issue). *The Use of English* designs its pages conscientiously for teachers of English and many British novelists could profit by its instruction in the art of composition. Occasionally these periodicals, on which I am being consciously severe—it is a necessary severity—do print important and exciting work; this is often when American critics reprint in their pages (e.g., Lionel Trilling's essay on Keats was printed for the third time in

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The Cornhill, Diana Trilling's piece on Simone de Beauvoir was also printed for the third time in *Twentieth Century*). All this is especially disastrous when it is remembered how little magazine publication has made for continuity and safeguarded the experimental tradition in English literature of this century, from Ford's *English Review,* through *The Egoist, Blue Review, Criterion,* to *Life and Letters* and *Horizon.* So it was all the more encouraging to see the recent emergence of two new miscellanies in England, the American-backed *Encounter,* edited by Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol, and John Lehmann's *London Magazine,* financed, not inappropriately, by the London *Daily Mirror.*

In *World Within World* Spender confesses to having been a card-carrying member of the Communist Party, though attempting to whitewash the action; this information is totally redundant after a glance through the first issues of *Encounter.* So wholly were the critical articles in the first issue of this magazine devoted to drop-the-bomb-now liberalism that Cyril Connolly, in *The Sunday Times,* and Philip Toynbee, in *The Observer,* and the leader writer of *The Times Literary Supplement* (possibly Alan Pryce-Jones), all independently protested against *Encounter's* preaching to the converted. Connolly thought Leslie Fiedler's essay on the Rosenbergs a "gloating account", while looking back over the first four issues Philip Toynbee found them obsessed by "obsessive literature". *Encounter* hit back in the Editorial to Number 4, signed by Irving Kristol, indicting *The Times Literary Supplement* with fellow-travelling, with "one of those unwitting, familiar concessions to Communist idealogy", and this in turn Toynbee called "depressingly reminiscent, this, of the Communist pugnacity which assumes that all who are not with me must be enemy agents". As for the creative side of *Encounter,* with its Woolf diaries, Yeats letters, and so on, even Connolly admitted that the literary section of Number 1 "might well have appeared about 1938". (This, of course, is the whole flavor of British writing today.) Finally, *The Times Literary Supplement,* considering both new miscellanies, wrote: "It would be a calamity if each of the reviews found itself driven back on the small inner ring of familiar names. . . ." That inner ring indeed, how well aspiring British writers know its roll-call!

For it is largely this "old firm", as Philip Toynbee calls it, which has on the whole adorned to date *The London Magazine,* "this important literary monthly", as Bumpus advertise it, "edited by John Lehmann, who is a critic of great eminence". Eliot, Bowen, MacNeice, L. P. Hartley, Henry Green, William Plomer, Rex Warner, all these *London Magazine* writers were, in Toynbee's words, "coming to their literary maturity some twenty years ago". Toynbee goes on to praise Lehmann's magazine for "reminding us that this excellent generation is still flourishing"! I agree that it is good to know that some of these writers are still alive, but it would be nice to see some of the younger names who have not quite such easy access to publishing firms. Here one realizes with a start that England has no younger writers of the vintage Mailer-Styron-Robie Macauley at all. Lehmann's new names, like that of Hugo

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Charteris, are close on forty (Angus Wilson is in his forties). What poet has added sensibly to his or her stature in England since about 1940? Very few. And have Cary, Green, or Waugh really advanced on work they were doing fifteen years ago? Sansom's last novel *A Bed of Roses* betrayed a serious loss of control in this talented writer. Mittelholzer, after a promising start, seems to be overwriting himself frantically. And the young novelists? What of the major proportion of these 4,301 novels per annum? William Baxter? Possibly. But Gerald Hanley, Kingsley Amis, Robert Kee, and the rest, are they really to be held up as more than journalists? It is certainly very difficult to be critically generous to these writers when encomiums are lavished on them from every direction in England. One realizes the real decay of literary standards in England "not with a bang but a whimper" when *The Times Literary Supplement* allows correspondents to debate in all earnestness whether Cyril Connolly is a "great" writer or not (John Hayward *for*), when the British Council lists a monograph on Connolly in preparation, when a critic as apparently incapable as Alan Ross actually sits on the Maugham Award, when, on one hand, a novel so bad it cannot find an American publisher wins one of Britain's most coveted fiction prizes, and, on the other, Miss Bryher's historical novels on English themes, published here by Pantheon with critical acclaim, cannot find a British publisher. Rather naturally the new British novelists fear to offer "innovations in attitude or expression".

Saintsbury's charge of "the fatal philistinism in taste and politics, and in other matters, which has been the curse of our race" does appear to be dogging Britain today. It seems almost impossible to get discriminating standards erected. The Joyce-baiter Edmund Gosse dies and we heave a sigh of relief. But what happens? His place is taken on *The Sunday Times* by another professional philistine, Sir Desmond MacCarthy ("one of the best-loved English men of letters" according to Robert Gorham Davis). Having tacitly concurred in the vilification of *The Naked and the Dead,* and having called E. E. Cummings "insolently silly" in 1950, Sir Desmond dies. And who do we get in his place? Cyril Connolly—Sir Cyril should I say?—now has this chair. No wonder books like *Lucky Poet* appear for it is this class which likes to call Americans barbarians, although America now buys hundreds of thousands of copies of *New World Writing* and *Discovery,* two little magazines happily free of advertising.

The situation is especially reprehensible in the two "official" organs, which should function as patrons of the minority writer, the B.B.C. and the British Council. I have nothing against either of these organizations in their place, that is in a society where literature is still lively; and as State bodies encouraging interest in letters in a moribund culture I suppose it seems churlish to cavil at their activities at all. But when these organizations are virtually all that is left of the serious in "official" England, and when writers are having their plays returned to them by the B.B.C. for having a "cynical" ending, you realize just how vitiating the general flattening of the literary audience has become there.

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What would happen, I ask myself sometimes, as my eye slides over the urbane periods of some essayist in *The Times Literary Supplement*, were a Joyce to publish a novel in London tomorrow? The answer is that it would receive incredibly inept attention in the daily press (in about a fifth of the space allotted to literature by, say, *The New York Times* daily). It would be intelligently reviewed with a batch of other novels (with which it would thus be equated) in the opinion-forming weeklies, like *The New Statesman, Time and Tide, The Spectator*, and it would have the same attention in *The Times Literary Supplement* (whose factual accuracy appears to be growing alarmingly low, judging from the errors subsequently noted by scholars in the American learned press). It might get a mention from one of the intellectual giants of the British Council. And there the matter would end. But there would be absolutely no place where this possible masterpiece could have extensive review, be permitted to agitate opinion, and generally become assessed in the interplay of vital creative minds, as would be the case in this country.

The mass media in America keep employed a group of writers who are far happier writing for the type of public they admire, and who serve to define for all of us certain aspects of popular culture in their broadest boundaries. As well as printing interesting factual material, the glossy monthlies syphon off much semi-adolescent activity and insulate us all against Auden's nightmare:

Enormous novels by co-eds
Rain down on our defenseless heads
Till our teeth chatter.

The literary world of the British Boots Library subscriber is, however, the vague and characterless one of the British miscellany, and it is one certain American critics, like J. Donald Adams, would like to see in this country today: that is, a tolerably educated, tolerably cultivated, flaccid mass of generalized fiction readers. Next time you have the chance, go through to the back of a Boots drugstore in England and examine their library. You will be astonished at the number of novelists held of whom you will have never heard. Most of these are harmless old wives—of both sexes: Daphne Du Maurier, Elizabeth Goudge, Rosamond Lehmann, Charles Morgan. You will, I trust, note the omissions: Henry James, dos Passos, Faulkner. In view of this, the recent increase in the number of fiction titles published in the British Isles means precious little. As Kenneth Rexroth puts it: "any novel which can be put into literate English by an office employee, let alone one that already is in such shape, is sure to get published eventually."

It is enough to listen in to the B.B.C. Third Program. How civilized this is, our radio critics cry (thinking of *Howdy Doody*). Yet, is it? In music, possibly. In discussions of art, and drama, perhaps. But when it comes to fiction you have this amorphous, middlebrow, "safe" audience that has to be kept sweet. In Third Program considerations of past and present literature you

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have the polite, facile generalizations of the British scholar, untroubled, as he is, by anything so brash or "vulgar" as an American student who might put up his hand and ask a question about the facts. It is completely different, of course, when one listens to Gilbert Highet or Donald Bigelow. We at once realize that such men are conscientiously trying to interest those on the threshold of literacy in books. The British Third Program don, however, expects you to take seriously his twenty-minute summary of seventeenth-century poetry; the radio reviewer imagines you will reminisce with him in earnest as he bleats about his boyhood in Folkestone. (I shall not easily forget what a delight, and shock, it was for me to tune into the Third Program not long ago and hear the accents of an American Professor *who actually said something!*)

Nor, I am afraid, does the British Council, worthy body though it may be in many respects, do much to relieve the situation for the minority writer. A few jobs are given here and there—not always without nepotism, let us admit—but again the standards are so appallingly low that one emerges from most Council lectures feeling as if one had been smothered in buns. The almost total ignorance, or rather hushing-up, of Scottish affairs by the Council is in keeping with this whole fear of contaminating the general audience with anything that might seriously disturb.

All this may seem platitudinous enough, but in American fiction the minority writer has some chance. In poetry I imagine things will always be difficult, though an awful lot of poetry still gets respectably published (while a leading London publisher last year sold twenty copies of a highly praised collection by a fairly established native poet). In the United States not only are the little magazines engaged in erecting standards of discrimination, which after all eventually decide what fiction will be even commercially valuable, but the whole fiction market is being altered by the fact that a number of good examples have been making money, as with the movies. Of course this is partly due to the (fundamentally encouraging) fact that no fiction, beyond a few exceptional titles, is "selling" at all, in the old sense. And for this reason the minority writer is well in the running for attention. For if you are almost certain to lose money on a novel anyway (break-even points now being as high as 15,000 in some firms) why not, the publishers argue, lose on a novel of reasonable quality that may have longevity? We are all aware of the gloomy statements by frightened publishers. The head of Dodd, Mead has not hesitated to say that first novels will soon be "almost impossible" to publish. Another leading publisher has confessed, "We are aiming frankly at the book club type of book." And so on.

Tom Hopkinson, reacting against these trends, has charted in an article the "possible fall" of the fictional best-seller. But *au fond* Hopkinson does not distinguish between the climate of fiction in England and in America. In fact it is obvious that he thinks of the minority writer in the current British terms, *viz.* a writer opposed to the "ponderous style of writing" of Frances Parkinson

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Keyes, but one who is in no way disturbing to the Boots subscriber. In America, however, another kind of minority writer not only exists, but exerts influence. Hopkinson does not realize that even out of commercial interest publishers will be led to publish good fiction, after the best-seller era is over. Huge sums have recently been made by the Dreiser and Conrad estates. Virginia Woolf made a lot of money before she died. Lawrence's Penguin sales in England are enormous today, whereas in this country *Ulysses* must have a considerable annual sale.

The crass audience with which America is so glibly credited does not, in my opinion, impinge adversely on the minority writer as does the same audience in England. Here the glossies keep to themselves and leave the serious writers to get on with their business. But in England B.B.C. and British Council are making constant calls on writers like Spender, MacNeice, and P. H. Newby, and their work seems to be getting thinner and thinner as a consequence. And, after all, even the Third Program audience is littered with readers of magazines like *Everybody's, Illustrated,* even *Woman and Beauty.* We must not forget that England's highest selling newspaper is *The News of the World,* a lurid Sunday paper consisting largely of sex crimes and selling close on seven millions in its peak period, the summer. After *The Radio Times,* which sells automatically to all radio owners since it carries the program listings, *Reveille* is England's most popular periodical (3,713,803 and climbing all the time). *Reveille* and *Tit-Bits* are garish weeklies which lose little by comparison with *Wink, Titter,* or *Flirt.* One London publisher has said that sales of comic-books now define troop movements in England and a thriller writer, called "Hank Janson", whose works have just been prosecuted for obscenity, fabricates "mysteries" to make Spillane seem pallid.

I am not of course claiming that serious English writers peruse *Tit-Bits.* But I do maintain that in England a general vitiation of taste, via comic-books and the like, affects the whole literary audience with repercussions on the minority writer which is not the case here. Our publishers tend to publish *either* popular *or* serious fiction, and have done with it. The serious writer need not compromise. But in England the fate of the minority writer is apparently to vanish in the general middle-brow smog. As T. S. Eliot has written: "No other nationality perhaps provides so dense an environment as the English. The *intelligent* Englishman is more aware of loneliness . . . than the man of intelligence of any other nation." How true. It may be that, as Harry Levin writes of Cyril Connolly, "His work serves more or less authoritative notice that England, long declining into a second-class power, has begun her decline into a second-class culture." Or it may be that, as a colleague put it to me recently, the situation will have to change for the better, since it cannot do so for the worse.

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JOSEPH KERMAN

Armchair Opera

THE SENTENCES BY STRAVINSKY WHICH INTRODUCE his recording of *The Rake's Progress*[1] are characteristically pointed and controversial. Our critics have said that his hero is not so rakish as Hogarth's: "it is time to correct the notion that our Rake's Progress 'follows' Hogarth's in any close sense". Auden's libretto has been insistently belittled: it is time to compliment the poet, once again. Stravinsky adds coolly that in two years since its premiere, the opera has had over 200 performances, seven of them, perhaps, in its native America. The Metropolitan Opera chose not to broadcast it last season, and drops it from the repertory this year.

Stravinsky praises the mechanical reproduction of music, and says that this recording is "a document of his wishes respecting the music". It is not. The engineers have succeeded in creating the illusion that the listener is a few inches away from the performers; an acoustic ideal that may be suitable to chamber music, but is as inappropriate to opera as the movie close-up is to a stage play. Even worse, this invariably results in a balance quite as atrocious as what would actually occur if the orchestra, chorus, and soloists were all pressed into a small room. When the tenor sings—and Conley really has a small voice—the orchestra is all but inaudible; the chorus looms over your armchair, and their sibilants, especially, are much more taxing than the record-scratch we used to have in the dark ages before hi-fi. This imbalance is an absolutely maddening feature of many recent opera records. When these have been simply tape-recorded from radio performances, as is so often the case, the fault may be shifted to the broadcasters, or to the record-company front office which takes the cheap way. But when the recording is done at a special studio performance, the blame is squarely with engineers who are as contemptuous of music as they are considerate of acoustical fidelity.

In matters of interpretation, the recording might be taken as a document of the composer's wishes. It is not—at least, not of his wishes regarding the *opera;* for the performance has been scaled to "a purely-musical reading, that is, a reading deprived of the theatre's time-scale and visual and histrionic elements". This strikes me as dangerous nonsense. Any recording of an opera is a frank makeshift, to which the listener must (and I believe can fairly successfully) supply the theatre's time-scale and visual and histrionic elements in the imagination. They are posited by the score, and to make deliberate alterations

[1]THE RAKE'S PROGRESS, by *Igor Stravinsky.* Gueden, Thebom, Conley, Harrell, Metropolitan Opera Chorus and Orchestra, conducted by the composer. Columbia SL-125. $17.85.

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in a work conceived for the stage in a non-theatrical performance is to change its fundamental shape, its line and its rhythm. And surely Stravinsky does not imagine that by speeding up a few tempi he has removed the necessity for one's projection of the stage setting. No, for this he would have to write a new piece; Beethoven's overture *Leonora No. 3* comes to mind. All Stravinsky has produced with this reading is a nervous dash through the score which rarely allows the music to sing. It is a transcription for that new ominous instrument, the phonograph, and as such cannot be taken as finally authoritative.

It is implied that the Metropolitan cast, employed here, meets the composer's wishes. It does not. Hilde Gueden is a delightful Mimi, Musetta, Eva, or Rosalinda, but she is badly miscast as Anne Trulove. Both the English language and the style of the music lie strange for her, and she has the definite air of one forced into doing a job without joy. If, as I believe, the *Rake* is the first opera ever to join proudly first-class music to first-class English verse, it is fatal to have our heroine begin with *The wuhdss are grin* and proceed to *be alwess near!* and *soupport my father and stranghten my resolve.* . . . Blanche Thebom's diction is little better; if Miss Gueden sounds like a foreigner who has learned by rote, Miss Thebom sounds like a caricature of singing-teachers' pronunciation. One thing which she has been taught, and which the microphones delight in exaggerating, is to stress the final sound of a word: *lovvve, fearrr,* and she can even manage *payyy.* Her Baba is vocally hammed, and not pleasant in terms of sheer sound. Eugene Conley sings with modesty and style, and with the very slightest trace of a brogue, which is attractive for Tom; but it is a wooden characterization, with precisely the same amount of controlled feeling at the start as later in the brothel, in the scene with Anne, in the struggle with Shadow, and dying in Bedlam. No wonder critics who have not sung from the score find Tom pale. And the portrayal of Shadow by a fine actor, Mack Harrell, makes the other insufficiencies all the more acute in comparison. To be sure, Shadow is the easiest role, and one can imagine, and may even wish for, a different interpretation. But the integrity and conviction of this one will never be in question. Mr. Harrell sounds like *somebody,* not like an opera singer struggling with that mysterious art, music.

It is doubtless my faith in the eloquence of *The Rake's Progress* that has made my disappointment in this recording keen.

Before the *Rake,* Stravinsky skirted opera. *Oedipus Rex* is a celebrated, rarely-presented work which is said to be vaguely dramatic in form; here finally is a recording to judge from.[2] The usual initial reaction to the piece, which I share, is to be exasperated by the intellectual flim-flam that seems to shroud the music more deeply than any other score by this composer. For the staging, first of all, Cocteau has suggested several schemes which smack of the experi-

[2]OEDIPUS REX, by *Igor Stravinsky.* Mödl, Krebs, Pears, Rehfuss, von Rohr, Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by the composer, Cocteau reading. Columbia ML-4644. $5.95.

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mental theatre at its most precious. Then his libretto was translated into French from Sophocles, subsequently from French into a medievalish Latin; the reason given is that "Latin is a medium not dead, but turned to stone, and so monumentalized as to have become immune from vulgarization." For the vulgar, "le Speaker" interrupts the music with an ostentatiously simple account of the tale in the vernacular. The present recording aggravates matters by having Cocteau take the Speaker's role in French, rather than in the anticipated vernacular English, in order to "make of this first recording an authentic historical document"; it could have been doubly literary if he had read the English translation, which is by e. e. cummings.

The usual second reaction to the piece is to be seized by a startlingly consistent force of musical expression; a reaction that may lead the critic in many directions, but in any case has surely to be trusted as primary. After the fashions are forgotten, the pretentions and oddities of *Oedipus Rex* become, not less pretentious, but essentially irrelevant; and one recalls, with a sigh perhaps, the many valid works of art, even in the realm of music, that have been foisted on the public with some such elements calculated to exasperate the sane. The only oddity that actually intrudes on the piece is the Speaker, for besides acting as *compère,* he has the effect of "distancing" the score, and of separating its sections very discretely. However, both of these functions are taken care of more than adequately in the music, and the spoken part could be eliminated altogether without losing anything but historical authenticity.

Oedipus Rex is disingenuously styled an "opera-oratorio", but it is not a dramatic presentation of the Oedipus story. It has on the contrary a strong ritual quality, as though Stravinsky were harking back to the prehistrionic origins of the Greek theatre. To stress always that the libretto is a "masterly contraction of Sophocles" is therefore not to the point, and invites invidious comparisons along dramatic lines; besides, it is not exactly true. Cocteau did make a fine and quite faithful contraction of the play, and published it as *Oedipe-Roi,* but what Stravinsky used is a drastic curtailment of this which departs as widely from Sophocles, in its way, as Cocteau's later and more familiar attempt, *The Infernal Machine.* In Stravinsky, most of the dialogue and all but two odes are omitted, so that a short series of oratorio-like tableaux remain. The reply of Creon after his denunciation is left out; at the end neither he nor the children appear, and Oedipus himself is only shown, but does not speak. Instead there is a brief choral epilogue to match the prologue, where the chorus speaks for Sophocles' Priest.

Now an immediate result of this is that much more crudely than in Sophocles, the secondary characters form themselves into a dispassionate procession of powers guiding the man to his fall. One by one, priests portraying Creon, Tiresias, Jocasta, the Messenger, the Shepherd, and the Second Messenger step forward, sing their single arias, and retire to make way for the next. The

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liturgical quality is most striking with the *Pastor* (who incidentally is supposed to appear with a symbolic lamb about his shoulders). *Opportebat tacere, nunquam loqui,* he sings, and proceeds without hesitation to tell the story, after which he repeats his first words as a *da capo.* In the drama, the Shepherd is in mental and physical agony; in the rite, he presents the traditional attitudes of his prototype as a beautifully formalized lament. The chorus, of celebrants also, not of real Thebans, plays a larger and larger part as the work proceeds. They interrupt with a piercing effect to fix Jocasta's fatal reference to the crossroads ("*trivium . . . trivium . . . trivium*"), and echo the First Messenger like a responsorial choir answering a cantor. With the Messenger and the Shepherd leading, they shout a litany at Oedipus: *Laio Jocastaque natus! Natus Laio et Jocasta! Peremptor Laii parentis! Coniux Jocastae parentis!,* and actually relate the whole catastrophe for the Second Messenger, who is reduced to repeating *Divum Jocastae caput mortuum!* as a terrible intonation. Since the chorus has known everything from the start, their closing farewell to Oedipus can be set to the same music, with some few changes, as their opening plea for rescue from the plague.

I have to disagree with those who find in the beautiful arias of Oedipus a progress comparable to that in Sophocles. Oedipus is as unchanging as the chorus; we should no more consider him as a personality than we should a consecrated wafer. As for the other roles, I do not know if it has been observed that they prefigure the unique personalities given them seven years later in Cocteau's *Infernal Machine,* personalities that are of course not present in *Oedipe-Roi.* Creon is the big-mouthed police-chief, Tiresias (regrettably enough) the grieving mystic, and Jocasta the scared café-society neurotic. Cocteau was on safer ground in adapting such characterizations with a whole play in which to justify them; but Stravinsky was not writing a play, and for him characterization was of secondary importance. His Jocasta has given offense. But Hieronymus Bosch and even Sebastian Bach illuminate the Passion with grotesques.

This ritual mode of presentation, as opposed to the dramatic mode, is unfamiliar, and difficult to define, but more striking in this work than in any other I know, more than in the Bach Passions, or Stravinsky's *Sacre, Symphony of Psalms, Orpheus,* or the *Mass.* The music is gauged to it with extraordinary surety. The final revelation to Oedipus, for instance, is managed by a gradual rhythmic extinction which produces an unearthly, un-Sophoclean stillness and intensity. This is prepared by the Corinthian Messenger's recital, constructed on a complex and typical rhythmic pattern (ex. 1) beginning with an anapaest —a favorite metrical foot for Stravinsky, who also likes to substitute for it figures made up of three or four shorts and a long (. . . —; . . . . —). At first this rhythmic pattern is much repeated, but as the catastrophe nears the melody and harmony pull in to a single note, and the rhythm reduces itself down to

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the bare anapaest, or these other similar feet (ex. 2), which are finally revealed as the declamatory unit for Oedipus' final words:

Natus sum (. . —) *quo nefastum est;*
Concibui (. . . —) *quo nefastum est;*
Kekidi (. . —) *quo nefastum est;* . . .

The choral epilogue, a recapitulation which brings the whole work together, is again a remarkable conception. As I have said, it is essentially the same music as at the start; and this dulling choral chant over an *ostinato* bass has also been heard at the invocation of the gods before the entrance of Tiresias (Sophocles' parodos, shortened). Now at the two early appearances of this musical passage, it is rooted in a single triad. But as the work proceeds, a harmonic relationship of minor triads a minor third apart grows in importance—such as g-minor plus b-flat minor (ex. 3. This is the harmony, for instance, at Oedipus' revelation). In the concluding recapitulation, the choral chant involves the second triad together with the first: especially the most excruciating sound produced by the combination, the diminished fifth formed between the G (bass of the g-minor triad) and the D-flat (third of the b-flat minor triad). It has grown out of the Messenger's huge reiterated cry of *Divum Jocastae* (ex. 4). The D-flat thus newly introduced into the final chorus may seem a small detail, but in context it is a potent one, textually as well as musically. Stravinsky's odd declamation has the effect of flattening, neutralizing, "monumentalizing" his words. When on the other hand a key word is sung naturally, it can have a peculiar poignancy: thus *amá bam* in this final passage, declaimed without distortion on precisely the crucial D-flat (see ex. 5). But just what in the name of the songstress Sphinx this tender note is doing in a presentation of this myth, only Jean Cocteau can answer. "*Adieu, adieu, pauvre Oedipe! adieu Oedipe; on t'aimait.*"

The singing on the present recording is excellent. But I do not remember a recent vocal record in which the orchestral part is so important, and so inaudible. So except as an authentic historical document it is quite a failure.

* * *

The chorus in *Oedipus Rex* is not properly speaking dramatic in function; and when one stops to consider, there are few well-known operas that employ the chorus to further the drama in an integral and consistent way. *Boris Godunov* is one; another is that crystalline little piece by Henry Purcell and Nahum Tate, *Dido and Aeneas*.[3] Here the chorus of Dido's courtiers is admirably Sophoclean in spirit, although at first glance it may seem to take less part in the action than Aristotle might have wished. The tiny first act contains

[3]DIDO AND AENEAS, by *Henry Purcell.* Flagstad, Mandikian, Schwarzkopf, Hemsley, Mermaid Singers and Orchestra, conducted by Geraint Jones. HMV LHMV-1007. $5.95.

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Ex.1. MESSENGER

Reppereram in monte puerum Oe - di- po-da,
derelictum in monte parvulum Oe - di - po-da.

Ex.2.

8va

in monte reppertus est.

[EXEUNT]

MESSENGER & SHEPHERD

repeated 5 times

2

2

ORCH.

Ex.3. Ex.4. Di - vum Jo-cas-tae ca - put mo --- rtuum!

Ex.5.

Te — am a bam, te miseror.

ass, ntinues]

... etc.

Va - le, Oe - di - pus ...

Mi - - ser Oe di pus oculos tuos deploro.

Miser .....

Vale, vale Oe dipus, miser Oedipus noster, te ama bam, Oedipus.

---------- etc. ----------

[11 more bars]

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five short choruses, led by Belinda, Virgil's Anna, who doubles as chorus-leader and confidante. Repeatedly they encourage the proposed match between Dido and Aeneas, finally calling for the Triumphs of Love and the Revels of Cupids as they go off to the hunt. Their hearty enthusiasm and brainlessness are at odds with Dido's single apprehensive aria—though this too, perhaps, speaks as yet in the accents of courtly convention.

Act II shows the plotting of the Witches, who (hair-raisingly) substitute for Jupiter and Venus in hastening Aeneas' desertion. Dido and her court, of course, know nothing of this; but when we see them in the country in the next scene, there is a strange melancholy to their song, which is not what the "Triumphing Dance" had led us to expect. The scene opens with what might be described as a masque fragment, a graceful, solemn little suite of song and dance to entertain the Queen while Aeneas hunts; yet it is the story of Actaeon and Diana that comes to mind, in the lonesome vales which had been said to be so favored of Venus. The storm dispels the chorus, and Dido too, decorously enough. Aeneas is left to hear the Witches' "trusty elf / In form of Mercury himself", to wrestle with himself cursorily, and to accede to the fake demands of fate.

In Act III the Witches appear again, with a rude chorus of the departing sailors, whose traditional sanguine song of abandoning their girls practically puts the words into Aeneas' mouth. After a violent scene with Dido, he leaves, and she prepares to mount her funeral pyre. Two choruses exquisitely frame Dido's famous lament, "When I am laid in earth". As Aeneas goes, she sings in recitative: "But Death alas I cannot shun / Death must come when he is gone"; then the chorus, gravely silent during the quarrel, comments: "Great minds against themselves conspire / And shun the cure they most desire." This platitudinous couplet is like those with which the Greek chorus often breaks into a highly-charged dialogue. It is all of thirteen bars long, but set in place with a brilliant sense of the drama. It provides a release of tension; a sudden new vantage point, an outside point of balance from which to gauge Dido's grief; a delicate transition from the stabbing dialogue in the quarrel to the lyric pace demanded by the conclusion; a tonal preparation for the coming g minor; and a great passage of time, a lifetime of decision for Dido. The luminous chords at the start turn to the minor mode and to quiet repetitions of a poignant figure in the ending phrase. From the flippancy of Act I and the vaguely motivated melancholy of Act II, the chorus comes finally to gravity and awareness. They have learned to keep their counsel; they grieve, they support, they comprehend and accept.

This puts foolish Aeneas and the pantomime Witches out of mind, and Dido's supreme aria can follow. By the clock, this occupies about a twelfth of the time of the whole opera, and comes with an arresting spaciousness after the severe economy of the earlier action. No operatic climax has even been ap-

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proached with more strength, and directness; the piece has a genuinely classic dramatic rhythm. The aria does not end, but flows into the wonderful final chorus, the longest and most carefully elaborated in the opera. To a solemn choral dance, "Cupids appear in the Clouds o'er her Tomb"; Cupids though "with drooping wings"; Dido's agony softened and deepened out towards the audience through the mourning community on the stage. This scene may serve as a touchstone against which to try the death-scene of Tom Rakewell. Through the opera, Dido and the chorus advance and converge, and at the end the courtiers, grown worthy of Dido's government, can take the stage after her death in full consciousness of the tragedy.

The present performance is generally good, but bland, in the English fashion. Elizabeth Schwarzkopf as Belinda is another German lady sorely miscast; she can negotiate the role only by the expedient of swallowing all the words. But Kirsten Flagstad's Dido beggars criticism, and the least of its virtues is an English diction that puts Misses Schwarzkopf, Gueden, and Thebom to shame. It is not often that a recorded performance can bring tears to your eyes, it is so impeccably beautiful. Yet is not Miss Flagstad's dispassionate ideal more appropriate to the classicism of David than to that of Virgil, or that of Purcell? A marvellous recording of *Dido* was made years ago on 78 rpm records under the direction of the late Constant Lambert, using the edition of Edward J. Dent. The Dido, Joan Hammond, cannot compare vocally with Flagstad, but there is a pride and passion to her singing, in recitative but also in aria, that is exactly right for the baroque dramatic conception. That recording will prove hard to match for its imaginative recapture of the grand rhetoric of the seventeenth-century theatre.

(An innovation in the new recording is an amended ending to Act II. Here Tate, who meant each scene to close with a chorus or a dance, had provided for a chorus of Witches, who reenter for the occasion; this was arbitrary enough, and Purcell never composed it; he was in any case picking his choruses rather carefully as the opera neared its climax. The curtain on Aeneas' long recitative is not very satisfactory to modern taste, however effective it may have seemed to Purcell, as to Lully, Cavalli, and Monteverdi. To us, Aeneas seems like a boob, but Purcell no doubt meant to give him dimension, not by an aria, but by an intense, climactic recitative. Well, perhaps this was not his forte.[4] The added chorus on this record (from the "Welcome Song for His Majesty, on his return from Newmarket, Oct. 21st, 1682") is unimpressive, and anyhow in the wrong key; the plan (from Lully again) was to have each scene around a single key, so this one should end in a, or maybe d, not C.)

One gets more and more curious about Lully, who with Philipe Quinault

[4]Compare the real thing in the astonishing *L'incoronazione di Poppea* of Monteverdi [*Concert Hall 1184*].

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could monopolize the court that had listened to Racine. Polemic insistence on drama, rather than on musical diversions, brought to certain opera composers of the past immense popularity which has not lasted to the present day. There are no operas by Lully on LP records; catalogues listing seven recordings of *Tosca* provide one appalling *Walküre* which ought to be withdrawn; yet Gluck, curiously, seems to be fairly well represented. *Iphigenia in Tauris,* said to be his masterpiece, is only a memory at the Metropolitan, and this recording was made at the festival of Aix-la-Chapelle.[5] Like *Oedipus Rex,* it is a work with a strange, powerful inner consistency, and without a pretty detail. Those who do not know Gluck must simply listen to it, and in a sufficiently elevated frame of mind; there is nothing quite like it, and I dare say that it will come as something of a revelation. The recording is graced by a magnificent performance by Patricia Neway as Iphigenia. Her singing may not be particularly beautiful in vocal quality, nor technically finished like that of the elegant French supporting cast. But Miss Neway can use the voice dramatically, and color it (like Mack Harrell) to make it a superbly eloquent and variable emotional carrier; and in her conception of the role, which is penetrating and integral, the richness of feeling fully establishes Iphigenia's greatness. How different, once again, from Kirsten Flagstad's Alceste, whose sumptuous, monumental purity did not suit Euripides or Gluck (Goethe, now, might be closer). Miss Neway's accomplishment seems to me all the finer in view of the absence of any Gluck tradition in this country—no performances, no records to listen to; and those recitatives can seem so stilted in the score, before their true temper is revealed. She is not only good visually on the stage, she acts *with the voice:* an ability imperative to good opera singing, and one whose lack is relentlessly and most regularly revealed by recordings. I must not (like Virgil Thomson) seem to tell singers off about their private laryngal idiosyncracies, and I ought not to make invidious comparisons. But between singers like Miss Neway and the young Americans fostered by the Metropolitan—one could almost speak of a "school" —the choice is very clear as to who will develop, and excite us, and continue to vitalize the art of opera.

[5]IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS, by *Christoph Willibald von Gluck.* Neway, Massard, Mollet, Simoneau, Paris Conservatory Orchestra, conducted by Carlo Maria Giulini. Pathé-Vox PL 7822. $10.90.

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VIVIAN MERCIER

Another Look at the Sitwells

I STARTED OUT WITH THE INTENTION of dutifully reviewing three books[1] by the Sitwells which were recently published in the U. S.; but two of the books, like their authors, I find it difficult to take quite seriously.

Let us begin with Sir Osbert; when I was in my cradle, they tell me, he had already begun making war on bores and pundits; to be old, in his opinion, granted one no license to be tiresome. I disagree; when a man reaches his anecdotage and begins publishing his memoirs, he is entitled to be a trifle boring as a necessary preliminary to becoming a Grand Old Man of Letters. I did not expect, however, that Sir Osbert's own reminiscences would be quite so *assommant* as they were; after dipping into the first volume, I decided to leave the other six or seven to those with more leisure and more patience than I.

What shocks me about Sir Osbert's *Collected Stories* is the realization that the hapless man was *born* a bore, that back in the days when he was supposed to be a dashing *condottiere* of the literary world he could induce coma almost as rapidly as now. Take "Triple Fugue", which dates from 1924, when its author was only 32; I have occasionally heard this referred to as a masterpiece of witty satire—but just look at it! The author gives away the joke—namely that three people have only one personality between them—in the foreword to his story, and goes on repeating it for 75 pages, until the three persons have become one as the result of plastic surgery after an airplane accident. This narrative formula apparently fascinates Sir Osbert, for he repeats it in two almost equally long and tedious tales, "That Flesh is Heir to . . ." and "Charles and Charlemagne". Take a not very good joke and run it into the ground—that seems to be how one gets a reputation for wit in the London literary world. I had always suspected as much. When a Dublin wit begins to repeat himself he moves to London.

Something ought to be said about Sir Osbert's total incomprehension of the middle and lower classes—I speak as a member of them—since he lays claim in his preface to "a love and understanding of human beings". Love perhaps, but not understanding; no Sitwell ever understood anybody except another Sitwell, so far as I can discover, and there is no particular reason why he should. All

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[1]COLLECTED STORIES, by *Osbert Sitwell*. Harper. $5.00. GARDENERS AND ASTRONOMERS: New Poems, by *Edith Sitwell*. Vanguard. $2.75. SELECTED WORKS OF SACHEVERELL SITWELL. Bobbs-Merrill. $4.00.

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the Sitwells look at the average man with something akin to bewildered horror, tempered by inordinate pity; or rather, they don't really *look* at him at all. What they think they have observed of the exterior of this dingy being, they then extrapolate into his interior life. I have no desire to probe a dreary piece of pseudo-observation like the monologue "You can carry it, Mrs. Parkin", in order to prove my point, nor shall I turn to the alleged character-sketches in *England Reclaimed and Other Poems* (Atlantic-Little, Brown. 1950). I would merely say that Sir Osbert ought to leave the colorless lower middle classes to their own "colorless" authors—Dickens, H. G. Wells—who know their drab lives intimately.

Sir Osbert's best short stories are not stories at all, but familiar essays, like "The Man Who Drove Strindberg Mad"; they are, however, short. "I am an author", says Sir Osbert in his preface—all the Sitwells are inveterate preface-writers, for their own and other people's books—"I am an author who, for better or worse, cannot write without making of what he is writing a work of art." Perhaps because of his talent for the familiar essay, the said preface is the most artistic—or at any rate the most artful—piece of writing in *Collected Stories*. Come to think of it, the Preface may be Sir Osbert's divinely appointed art form. He does possess a certain talent for descriptive writing—one all too often addressed to the ear rather than the eye—but it usually serves only to impede the progress of his stories. Let us wish this quondam anti-pundit a long and happy life as a pundit, provided always that he devote himself to the execution of prefaces for the books of younger and better writers.

About Dr. Edith Sitwell—two Northern English universities have given her honorary doctorates—I have half a mind to say nothing; intuitively I regard her later poetry as headed for Ella Wheeler Wilcox territory; when I offer reasons for such a view, I find myself entering an argument that started almost before I was born and involves the poetry of Sacheverell as well as his sister. (For anybody but a Sitwell to call Sir Osbert a poet is, I think, laughable.) The argument was well off the ground when Dr. Sitwell wrote her introductory essay for Sacheverell's *Collected Poems* in 1936; at that time she was blaming an overly intellectual approach on the part of the critics for their poor reception of her own and her brother's poetry; hence my desire to stand pat on mere intuition.

In 1950 the argument soared off into the stratosphere; Mr. Jack Lindsay, in his introductory essay for *Façade and Other Poems 1920-1935*, published that year by Duckworth, wrote as follows:

> She is the first fully *English* writer, in the sense I have given the term, since Dickens. . . . In her work, and in her work alone, the post-Romantic wound of our culture is understood, probed, and healed.

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According to Sitwell adepts, people who, like myself, do not relish Dr. Sitwell's later work fail to understand or appreciate it because it employs traditional symbolism. If I chose to enter this argument, I would say first of all that I have no *a priori* objection to traditional symbolism; I do, however, take exception to the way in which it is used in Dr. Sitwell's more recent work.

"Gold", for instance, if judiciously used, can be one of the most evocative and sonorous words in the English language; "green" can be another. The poem "Gardeners and Astronomers" uses these two words, along with "planet" and "plant", as its key symbols; fair enough. But does not the use of the word "gold" nine times in a 63-line poem and three times in one sequence of four lines argue some sort of imaginative impoverishment, especially when such related symbols as "Sun" and "orange" are each referred to three times? "Green" occurs six times, "planet" six times, "plant" three times, "garden" four times. If you say that this quantitative approach to a qualitative problem makes little sense, I have to agree with you. Still, some such facts as these must lie at the root of my intuitive dissatisfaction with this poem—which I regard as one of the better ones in the volume which bears its name.

Dr. Sitwell's own verbal criticism, while claiming to be objective, soon loses itself in rank subjectivity. In praising a rather ordinary line of Sacheverell's, she makes a great fuss over the fact that it ends with the "rolling, thundering"—there were other adjectives which I have forgotten—sound of the word "burned". Now, if the word "burned" were *intrinsically* so sonorous and evocative, any fool could use it at the end of a line and get the same effect. But words cannot be considered apart from their context, as I. A. Richards demonstrated long ago by the substitution of nonsense syllables with the same sound values for a stanza of Milton's "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity". The root fault of Dr. Sitwell's poetry, both early and late, is her conception of the word as a talisman, or as a key that unlocks at once a magic hoard; whereas words change not only their meanings but their music according to their context. Does a musical note have the same value in a be-bop tune that it has in a Bach fugue, even when played on the same instrument?

On second thoughts, I wonder if my quantitative approach *was* so silly. Opening at "Dirge for the New Sunrise", the first poem in *The Song of the Cold* (Vanguard, 1948) and one of "Three Poems of the Atomic Age", I read the following:

Bound to my heart as Ixion to the wheel,
Nailed to my heart as the thief upon the cross,
I hang between our Christ and the gap where the world was lost

And watch the phantom Sun in Famine Street—
The ghost of the heart of Man . . . red Cain,

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And the more murderous brain
Of Man, still redder Nero that conceived the death
Of his mother Earth, and tore
Her womb, to know the place where he was conceived.

Nine lines in all, in which we have:

1 *Ixion,* complete with wheel
1 *Christ,* with cross and thief
1 *Cain,* without Abel
1 *Nero,* without fiddle, but with allusion to Agrippina
3 *heart's*
1 *womb*
1 *world*
1 *Sun*
2 *Man's*
1 *Earth*
1 *death.*

Where do we go from there? Where *can* we go from there? Those who think Edith Sitwell has healed the wound of our culture will say, "But *all poetry* is in these words and symbols!" Precisely. Having put all poetry into these nine lines, why go on for 25 lines more? And the other two "atomic" poems are far longer. If you start a composition *fortissimo* and never call for a *diminuendo,* how can you ever produce a *crescendo?* That is a kind of question I should ask if I chose to get into the argument.

Let me say, without further ado, that I think certain claims which have been made over and over again for his brother and sister can be made with far greater justice for Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell. I think he possesses at least two of the stigmata of genius: (1) he does create a recognizable world of his own in which the reader is compelled to live; (2) that world is original in the sense that, no matter how much Mr. Sitwell borrows from others to make it, no other writer has created quite such a world before. Furthermore, I think that in early middle age his work began to change and deepen—"took on a new dimension", if you like. We can tentatively date the beginning of this development from 1936, when *Dance of the Quick and the Dead* was published; it may have reached its climax in *Splendours and Miseries,* published in 1943.

Later on I shall attempt to define the nature of Mr. Sitwell's world; at the moment, I would merely say that when one finds a potential bit of that world as yet uncolonized—the gesso panels of Charles Prendergast, for example—one wants to send the following telegram:

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> Sacheverell Sitwell, England. Territory ripe for annexation. Will not exist until you have discovered it. Come at once.

Mr. Sitwell has achieved the status of a major prose writer first of all by carefully choosing his ends and then by developing—at the expense of enormous research and, I should imagine, of very hard and constant work at his style—the means to achieve them. His later style presents two main features: in Conrad's phrase, so beloved by Ford Madox Ford, it "makes you see"; and it always conveys a sense of movement, even when the subject-matter is totally static. Where there is arrested movement in a painting or tapestry, Sitwell animates it; if all else fails, he will project himself into the picture he is describing—*premier plan, second plan,* moving through one plane after another.

In his more recent works, the sense of immediacy, and perhaps the sense of movement also, is invariably heightened by an almost exclusive use of the present tense. The following passage from *Primitive Scenes and Festivals* (1942) struck me as so Sitwellian that I quote it here as an index and perhaps even a parody of his developed style:

> Here are booths of amulets and sacred emblems. There is a smell of wax. There are the candle shops. Little plaster statuettes show saints or sinners writhing in the fire. We are among the the statues. You will see wings being fitted to a wooden doll. Gods and goddesses are for sale in the workshops. And, at the corners, there are barrows for old clothes.

This is Impressionism, but broken up into such tiny units that it might almost be called *pointillisme*—and we know how damnably monotonous a gallery of *pointilliste* paintings can be, especially after the recent "Seurat and His Friends" exhibition in New York. Yet, in spite of his over-use of the verb *to be,* Sitwell rarely becomes monotonous for me, possibly because of that constant movement, those leaps forward which are represented here by "We are among the statues". Sitwell is always "among" everything he writes about.

But what does he write about? In his early years Mr. Sitwell chose his subjects with deliberation and cunning, as he frankly admits in the introduction to his *Selected Works:*

> Having been labeled as "Futurist" in early days, I find that a ticket with "Baroque" inscribed on it seems ever since to hang around my neck. But, in fact, I addressed myself to the subject only because I was looking for material to sharpen my pen on, and at this time of day little fame is to be had by writing on Botticelli or Fra Angelico.

Southern Baroque Art (1924) was his first prose work; in it he tracked down the Baroque style to its ultimate destination in Central and South America and

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Portuguese India, as we learn from the excerpt "Mexico" in *Selected Works*. This unprejudiced, "global" approach at once distinguishes him from most European academic historians and critics of art. In a passage characteristic of his earlier style, his innate love for the exotic makes him revel in rather than deplore the Mexican Indian influence on the expatriate Spanish Baroque, and *vice versa*:

> The Indians, far from being reduced by the Spaniards to that abject submission and impassivity in which they are usually depicted, have produced, as we have seen, as many great works of architecture after as before the Spanish Conquest. The churches are bigger than the ancient temples, better planned, and show a more successful expression of exactly those emotions that they tried to give shape to in their pagan temples.

In this extract from his first prose book we can at once recognize an original mind at work. There have been four books by him on the Baroque, but when Mr. Sitwell turned to something as hackneyed as the Middle Ages in *The Gothick North* (1929-30), he again managed to find new things to say. Avoiding the much-written-up cathedrals as far as possible, he concentrated instead upon the abbeys, and above all upon the then relatively unfamiliar tapestries and miniatures. The book's form is original, too, but not very successfully so; I have not space to discuss it here.

Not all Mr. Sitwell's books have been so original in concepiton, but his travel books and his monographs (on subjects as diverse as *Mozart, Liszt, Conversation Pieces, Narrative Pictures, Old Fashioned Flowers, Poltergeists*, and *British Architects and Craftsmen*) undoubtedly helped provide the material for what I may call the "great fantasias"; these are to date five in number: *Dance of the Quick and the Dead* (1936), *Sacred and Profane Love* (1940), *Primitive Scenes and Festivals* (1942), *Splendours and Miseries* (1943), and *The Hunters and the Hunted* (1947). Only the last of these has been separately published in the United States. In all these fantasias except the third the author has interpreted his title in the widest and most personal manner possible.

Selected Works includes five passages from *Splendours and Miseries*, more than from any other of his books; it is probable that Mr. Sitwell considers it his masterpiece. To represent the splendours we have "Fugue", a survey of the major organ works of Bach, and "The Golden Reign of Saturn", mainly concerned with the frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli in the Campo Santo at Pisa, but modulating to the miseries of the variously attributed "Triumph of Death", another of the Campo Santo frescoes.

More misery than splendour will be found in "Hurdygurdy", an extraordinary imaginative evocation of Gusikov, an almost unknown Russian-Jewish virtuoso of the cymbalom, who took the concert-halls of Europe by storm just

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before his death from tuberculosis about 1835. Indisputable miseries are "Ames Damnées" (evoking Madeleine Smith, the Scottish poisoner, who presumably killed her first lover by arsenic, but herself lived to an incredible age) and "Battle in the Steppe":

> . . . inspired by a photograph, taken by a German soldier, that appeared in one of our illustrated papers at some date in 1943. . . . It was the forcing of a river (Dnieper, Don or Volga?) under a heavy smoke barrage by the German army invading Russia.

He goes on to say of this masterpiece of prose:

> In its conception there is some influence from Brueghel's paintings; and where the harvesters are described eating their midday meal among the stooks of corn there is an obvious reminiscence of Brueghel's picture in the Metropolitan Museum. But it was my own invention to have the battle going on at the same time in the distance, and to put the workers from the collective farms into dancers' practice dress.

The entire *morceau* becomes a vast simile between the Ukrainian grain harvest and the battle:

> The whole battle is in monstrous parody on the harvest. It has continued all night long, but we will meet it in the morning. There are chained lights, or at least they hang in chains, that float in the heavens and come slowly down. And red flares. And moths that court the flames. The night must be weary with the noise of wings. And there is the beating of the flail, as well. The cranking, cranking of the caterpillar that crawls upon the leaf, but never turns into a butterfly. That is the panzer column. Where are the spearheads? They have eaten deep into the harvest. They have cut lanes that lead for miles and miles.

The *Selected Works* is itself an approximation of the great fantasias. The author's introduction describes it as "planned for the American public exactly as though it is an exhibition of selected paintings". It should be read straight through, as almost every excerpt offers a modulation to the next. Each passage, long or short, is presented in its entirety, just as it stood in the original work of which it formed a chapter or similar subdivision. Excluding the specially written introduction and dividing "Orpheus and His Lute" into its two large component parts, we have fifteen items, from 4 to 55 pages in length, covering in all about 380 large, well-printed pages. Because no passage is cut, this selection gives an adequate idea of Sitwell's genius, where Faber and Faber's anthology, *The Homing of the Winds*—60 items, 150 pages—merely irritates and frustrates the reader. One only regrets in the Bobbs-Merrill book the

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absence of the plates that accompanied and elucidated so many passages in the original editions.

"I know that I should now address myself more to persons than to things." These are almost the concluding words of Mr. Sitwell's introduction and they remind us of a very important fact about his work. His world is filled with things—works of art—rather than persons; this is true even when his pages swarm with people, as in the passages from his travel books on the Feria at Seville, the Djemaa El Fna market in Marrakesh, the streets of Bucharest, the Festival of St. Paulinus at Nola; the people in these passages are on-stage or they are movie extras; at any rate they are viewed entirely for their esthetic qualities—their dress, their grouping, their purely physical beauty, or their grotesquerie. Even when Sitwell studies the individual, it is most often the virtuoso who attracts him: Liszt, Paganini, Gusikov, the great ballet dancers of the past and the great pantomimists—from Watteau's "Le grand Gilles" and Deburau (the hero of *Les Enfants du Paradis*) to Grimaldi and the forgotten English clowns of the Victorian Christmas pantomimes.[2]

In the plastic arts Sitwell's range is enormous, from Picasso's Blue and Rose Periods to the relics of Etruscan and Mycenaean art. I should say, though, that aside from Negro sculpture—which, with Negro music, he detests—there is nothing so antipathetic to him as the painting of the High Renaissance. He demands always a certain stylization, a certain neglect of the too, too solid flesh. Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Veronese are painters about whom he would not, I think, care to write, even if so much had not already been written. He is, ultimately, a Pre-Raphaelite; while not particularly admiring Rossetti, he shares a number of his tastes: Blake, Samuel Palmer, the Campo Santo frescoes (a volume of reproductions of these was one of the sacred books of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood before any of them had been to Italy), and of course the poetry of Keats. "Every Englishman of my generation," writes Mr. Sitwell, "was brought up in childhood to look upon the Pre-Raphaelites as the most recent school of English painting." The Pre-Raphaelite influence can be felt in several passages of *Selected Works*. The opening excerpt deals with Rossetti, Swinburne and Miss Siddal; the Madeleine Smith selection, according to Mr. Sitwell, "is Pre-Raphaelite in treatment". For a third item we have "The Golden Reign of Saturn", on the Campo Santo frescoes.

Sitwell links up with the English tradition not only through the Pre-Raphaelites, not only through the subsequent Aesthetic Movement of the 1880's and 1890's (as when his style and outlook remind us of Pater and Wilde); he has affinities too with the Regency period and with the reigns of George IV and William IV. "London Charivari", devoted to George Cruikshank and other

[2]This passion for the theatrical holds good even where flowers and birds are concerned; see for example the long section entitled "The Kingdom of the Birds" in *The Hunters and the Hunted*. Only the most exotic and "stagy" birds are dwelt on there—macaws, tragopans, birds of paradise.

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cartoonists and illustrators of the period, reminds us of this fact; Keats, De Quincey and Leigh Hunt knew that London intimately. The Madeleine Smith episode recalls De Quincey's *Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, while Leigh Hunt, in four pages of the nineteenth chapter of his *Autobiography*, must have been the first important English writer to describe the Campo Santo frescoes. The dandyism of this period in England, with its strong element of the theatrical, is doubtless what appeals so powerfully to Mr. Sitwell.

Another favorite period, even more theatrical, is the Second Empire, dealt with in *La Vie Parisienne* (1937); there *everything* from the Emperor downward, including his vaunted army and his aggressive foreign policy, was a front, a paper façade demolished by Bismarck. The only solid legacy of the period is Haussmann's Paris, itself full of façade and theatrical perspective. Indeed even the Baroque may first have attracted Mr. Sitwell by the fact that it is *par excellence* the architecture of the stage set.

On one of the few occasions when Mr. Sitwell has chosen to exercise his powers upon a historical event (in *Splendours and Miseries*), he took as his subject the career of a false Messiah, Sabbathai Zevi, who captured the imagination of many European Jews in 1666. As in the Second Empire, history itself here takes on the illusory quality of a platform or back-drop for a mountebank. "Battle in the Steppe", too, has its touch of theatricality in the costume of the reapers, who wear the practice dress of the Russian ballet. Mr. Sitwell himself tells us in the introduction already so often quoted that the next influences to impinge on him after Pre-Raphaelitism were Post-Impressionist painting, Russian music and the Russian ballet.

At least as eclectic as Malraux, Sacheverell Sitwell may perhaps boast an even larger "museum without walls". Anatomical drawings of frogs, the lettering of nineteenth-century London shop signs—he can derive esthetic satisfaction from the damnedest sources, and succeed in communicating it to his readers. Essentially a descriptive writer, he has no compunction about describing places, such as Mexico, where at the time of writing he has never been. In order to give authenticity to his evocations, he will shamelessly pillage those who possess first-hand knowledge. A check-list of the unfamiliar books on travel, ornithology, horticulture and so on referred to in Mr. Sitwell's rather casual acknowledgements of sources would add up to a library for Bedlam While waiting for such books to be delivered to him in the British Museum Reading Room, he made a "pastime" of leafing through musical dictionaries!

Though librarians ruthlessly catalogue the great fantasias as "Essays, English", Mr. Sitwell has in them created what I believe to be an entirely new prose form —neither prose-poem nor essay nor autobiography nor art history, but an exhilarating hybrid of all four. He is not a Baudelaire nor a Hazlitt nor a De Quincey, nor, for all his imaginative research, a Huizinga, but there is something of all four in him; in a century's time he may appear as important a prose-writer as any of them.

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DUDLEY FITTS

Is There a Spanish Temper?

THE ONLY THING THAT THESE THREE BOOKS[1] have in common is Spain. *Spanish Stories and Tales* is, for better or for worse, what its title asserts it to be; *The Spanish Temper* begins like another informal travel-rhapsody on the order of Maugham's *Andalusia,* but it turns into something more significant; *The Structure of Spanish History* is a revision of *España en su historia,* a work of enormous erudition, first published six years ago and already a landmark in the field of Hispanic studies. Given such a disparity of points of view and intention, I find it impossible to formularize in such a way as to draw them together into a coherent and orderly discourse; consequently I shall ramble from one to another in a kind of Iberian pub-crawl.

Those of us who are old enough will remember the delightfully naïve geography that used to be taught in the lower grades of primary school. The French, we were told, are a frivolous nation, given to light wines and dancing; the English are solid and reliable, masters of empire, beef, and ale; the Spaniards are haughty, dilapidated, and preoccupied with bulls. This nationalistic approach is of respectable antiquity: Herodotos, to go no farther back, employed it; Tacitus and Caesar applied it to the Germans; and it still colors our thinking in spite of the recent enlightenment which has taught us that a defining National Temperament does not exist. I somehow expect a Maine man to be different from a Marylander, not merely in accent—as to some degree he is—, but in *mores,* in point of view, in sensibility. Mr. Pritchett is a proponent of this delusion, and a persuasive one: here we have once again the Spanish cult of death and the Spaniard's innate *nobleza,* both so elegantly hymned by Mr. Ernest Hemingway, to say nothing of the distinction between the idiosyncratic habits of provinces, cities, towns, hamlets, *barrios,* and individual streets. Mrs. de Onís shares it, too. The fiction of Spain and of Spanish America is, to her, something apart, something unlike any other fiction; although her own book, especially in its modern selections, shows how mistaken she is. Let us begin with *Spanish Stories and Tales.*

With three exceptions—two anecdotes dating from the thirteenth century and a story by Cervantes—her range is contemporary. What depresses me is the fact that her selection is intelligent and representative. I remember the amused despair of the late John Peale Bishop, who had spent I don't know how many months plowing through Latin American novels and short stories:

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[1]SPANISH STORIES AND TALES, selected and edited by *Harriet de Onís.* Knopf. $3.95. THE SPANISH TEMPER, by *V. S. Pritchett.* Knopf. $3.75. THE STRUCTURE OF SPANISH HISTORY, by *Américo Castro;* translated by *Edmund L. King.* Princeton. $9.00.

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he found them invincibly second-rate, and noted that the Spanish genius, at least in this hemisphere, spoke convincingly only in verse and the essay. (He should have excepted the Argentinians Jorge Luis Borges and Eduardo Mallea, however: their fiction can hold its own with the best.) *Spanish Stories and Tales* only widens the scope of this criticism by turning it back against the mother country. Ineptitude, uncertainty, imitativeness, sentimental histrionicism—all are here, and all add up to tedium.

I find only one of these stories totally exempt from what I have been saying: Mallea's *The Heart's Reason* [1953]; but Mallea is a *rarissima avis,* a writer as international as Hemingway, Forster or Alfonso Reyes. Others come close to him: the Cervantes, a dreary museum-piece; Borges's *The Secret Miracle,* which is much inferior to his best work; *I Puritani,* an oddly perverse little narrative by Palacio Valdés, spoiled by a self-conscious archness; and Miguel de Unamuno's *San Manuel Bueno.* Probably I should include Pío Baroja's *The Cabbages of the Cemetery.* But even the most successful of these, *San Manuel Bueno,* is disturbingly uneven. The story of a saintly village priest who tries to atone for his agonizing disbelief by taking upon himself the humblest and most strenuous concerns of his wretched parishioners—this is a story worthy of the human great thinker and writer that Unamuno was, and it is very nearly right. The form is good: anecdotal, reminiscent of one of those rambling mediaeval *Vitae Sanctorum,* but gathering the strands of anecdote together as it progresses towards its moving conclusion. There are moments of memorable insight: for example, the account of the narrator's infidel brother, compelled by the priest's sheer goodness to communicate at Mass:

> When it came my brother's turn, with a steady hand this time he gave it to him, and after the liturgical ". . . *in vitam aeternam,*" he bent down and whispered to him: "There is no eternal life but this . . . let them dream it eternal—eternal for a few years." And when he came to me, he said: "Pray, my child, pray for us." And then something so extraordinary that I bear it in my heart like the greatest of all mysteries, and it was the words he said to me in a voice that seemed of the other world: "And pray, too, for Our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is perfectly sure, and only Unamuno could have done it. But the story is dimmed, nevertheless, by a curious viscosity of sentiment, a reliance upon the easy appeal, the stock humor and the stock pathos: not a Spanish trait or an Unamuno peculiarity, but one of the flaws of second-rate fiction.

The general run of stories is much below this. Lino Novás Calvo suffers an acute attack of Hemingway in *The Dark Night of Ramón Yendía,* a cops-&-robber-chase affair spun out to absurd length and unerringly aimed at Hollywood. Benjamín Subercaseaux offers us a kind of homosexual marine idyll in which he asks us to believe that it is the custom among Chilean freight-boat

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skippers to incinerate their stowaways: at least, that's what happens to China Boy, the catamite hero of this *relato*—he simply ascends from the funnel in the shape of blue smoke, "the blue of heaven . . . celestial blue. . . ." ("I fainted," the narrator informs us, "and fell prone on the deck." As well he might.) Hernando Téllez crawls on our flesh with the tale of a miserable but stubborn proletarian who locks himself up in his hut and permits himself to be incinerated along with his wife and baby rather than undergoing dispossession. (That gives us four martyrdoms by combustion, a high incidence for forty pages.) Ramón del Valle-Inclán—a famous name—goes Poe in *My Sister Antonia,* a sticky and unintentionally hilarious account of diabolic possession: you cut off a black cat's ears, and the next day the villain appears, presumably hissing, with a black bandage on his face, "and it seemed to me that I could discern under it the bloody gashes where his ears had been cut off even with his head". And so on. Spanish? I deny it.

The translations are ordinarily readable, but little more. There are some amusing examples of jargon and insensitivity. Thus, at an intense moment in *San Manuel Bueno* we are informed that "there was not a dry eye in the house". My sister Antonia sobbed bitterly, "and then she began to twist my hand and to laugh and laugh and laugh"—for all the world like Little Audrey. In *I Puritani* one Spaniard tells another: "She suggested that we begin to call each other *tú,* the Spanish form of address used only by intimates". (Only yesterday I told my brother, who, like me, is a Bostonian, "Brother Charles, tomorrow I propose to visit Boston, the capital of Massachusetts.") Or this—and I can not say whether the author or the translator is to blame, but since the author is Rómulo Gallegos, I nominate the translator—:

> "How about taking you home, Marty?"
>
> "I'm ready and waiting, Martín."
>
> "Chums," replied the man-about-town, "tonight you couldn't even wring water out of me."
>
> "Cleaned out, are you? That doesn't matter."
>
> "You can pay later, kid. You know—"
>
> "No, no. I'll be running along on my own two cylinders. They're tops."
>
> The cab-drivers laughed at the light retort which the young man had loaded with that quality called Caracas esprit . . .

¡Ay, noches de Caracas!—But that, chums, is enough.

If *Spanish Stories and Tales* is as disappointing as I think it is, the fault is not that of Mrs. de Onís. True, she might have been a bit more forceful in editing the translations, although some of the *gaffes* I have quoted are her own. "The wealth of material", she writes, "has been so great. . ." I quarrel only with the word "wealth"; the pickings are indeed enormous, but they are jejune.

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The great glory of Spanish fiction: well, yes, there was such a thing; or, to put it more accurately, a great deal of fine fiction has been written in the Spanish language, as it has in the English and the French and the Russian languages. There is little of it being written now in any language: John Bishop need not have limited his strictures to Latin America. A dying art; and who shall determine the aetiology of the disease that is killing it? Those who blame the movies, radio, and television are surely confounding co-symptoms with causes. Ours is a dying age. Frontiers are of no importance. National "tempers" exist, perhaps, although I believe that they are largely superficial in spite of their apparent differentiability; and that is why I become impatient when I am told that "the Spanish ideal of beauty has in it less of the purely aesthetic, the finished and exquisite", and that it is "characterized by a large-hearted sympathy, understanding, and humor". What counts is the human "temper", the *vis saeculi,* which is less easy to talk about easily.

It it natural, therefore, that I should have approached Mr. Pritchett's book with some suspicion: the very title suggests the romantic orgastic type of writing typical of Mr. Roy Campbell in his maunderings about Provence and Spain—typical, I am sorry to say, of Mr. Ernest Hemingway in *Death in the Afternoon* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls.* Mr. Pritchett escapes the pitfall in spite of his intentions; or, to put it more kindly (as well as more lucidly), he is wise enough and perceptive enough to pierce the national *superficies* which is the theme of his book and penetrate to the human core. True, the travelogue is here—it had to be, if he was to make any sense at all—; but there is much more than delightful descriptions, amiable anecdotes, and *baile de máscaras* fun.

And yet. . . . How often a man sees what he wants to see, imposes his own *mystique* upon what he sees! This is how he concludes his discussion of Sevilla and the *sevillanos*:

> . . . Life is in the street. They are not shut away as we are. They have few secrets. They are at ease publicly in their virtues and vices, and their habits. Unamuno again: "Nothing human is alien to me." [But surely Mr. Pritchett knows the source of this aphorism!] A foreigner becomes bored, in the end, by the plain explicitness of Spanish life and of seeing so many basic and unabashed human beings who conceal nothing; but, for a time, the Spaniard, not seriously touched by the industrial age or the nervousness of modern man, is powerfully refreshing. He is a man before he is a specialist, a unit, a function of the social machine. Only when we consider him as a social being are we appalled by his intolerance, his cruel inertia, and, in Seville, by the coarseness of his boasting. There is a street in Seville now named after the Falangist hero of that city, Queipo de Llano, whose rollicking, boasting, and bloodthirsty broadcasts were famous in the Spanish Civil War. Yet a drunken picaresque spirit, as outrageous as the picaresque in *Don Juan,* loud and

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> raking, belongs to the place. The *sevillano* is stingy; but he is an actor; he loves the idea of great and notorious sins of the flesh. So many of the *sevillanos* have the coarse skins of those oranges that fall at last to rot in the alleys of the beautiful park, and from their faces the old Silenus looks out of wine-reddened eyes. But fiercely they will maintain the punctilio of God, the sacredness of the family, the world-breaking greatness of the country, and the wicked irreligion of the working class.

Artemus Ward once observed that Boston was "denomyunated the Modern Atkins: though I skurcely know what those air". I skurcely know Mr. Pritchett's Sevilla, although I have spent much time investigating that incomparable city. With a few necessary changes of props, most of this passage could apply equally well to Barcelona, to Naples, to Marseille, to Detroit. Not all of it: the remark about industrialism is acute, and there does seem to be a special kind of Spanish cruelty that I have encountered elsewhere only in Mexico. (No, I am not thinking of the Bulls, but of Queipo de Llano, an obscenity that became too much for even Franco to endure.) But is not this passage essentially an elegant inflation of the old primary-school gambit which I have mentioned? "The *sevillano* is stingy; but he is an actor." I don't understand the sequence of thought, but let that pass. The point is, *which* sevillano? Once I was asked to bring beer (the technical term among the *bostonianos* is "rushing the growler") to a literary friend who was being detained in the filthiest cell of the oldest jail in Valencia, and it was my good fortune to watch a *Guardia Civil* un-thumb his left hand in an attempt to open a bottle of *Estrella Roja* with his sabre. No complaint: he contemplated the job for a moment, grinned, and said, *"Pues, no faltaba más"*. What a chance to expatiate upon the stoicism of the *valenciano*, his affective stinginess, his ability to act in the very agony of dactylotomy! Yet, for all we know, the man may have been reflecting that at last he could resign from the *Guardia*, go back to his *huerta*, and strangle his wife, her lover (a stingy actor from Aragón), and the nineteen babies resultant from the concerted endeavors of the trio. That would be maintaining the punctilio of God.

This dithyrambic writing turns up again and again in *The Spanish Temper*; and to the extent that it does so, the book is precarious. Happily, there are brilliant compensations. Mr. Pritchett knows his Spain, and loves it. When he is recording—be it a bull-fight, or the desolation of the interior terrain observed from the air, or the *cante flamenco* in a smoky Andalusian thieves' cellar—his only peer, so far as I know, is George Borrow. This is literary *turismo* at a very high pitch of art. Moreover, he has a profound understanding of the political, economic, and religious nightmares that make the Spain of today a special department of Hell. He does not labor these problems: they are taken effortlessly into the grace of his discourse; but they are there, and what he says about them has been needed for years.

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When he sent me these books for review, the Editor remarked that *The Structure of Spanish History* would probably be incongruous in the context of the two which I have been discussing. He was right. Professor Castro's indispensable study ("An existentialist history of Spain", according to his publishers; but again I feel like Artemus Ward) is so clearly for the expert which I am not that I shall do no more here than acknowledge the pleasure that I have derived from a work magisterially written—and, let me add, magisterially translated. Reading it, I can almost believe that there is such a thing as the *ingenium Hispanicum*; but Don Américo's analysis of the forces that went into the creation of that *ingenium*—the Arabic and Jewish contributions especially —brings me back to my original thought. There are no nations any more. Were there ever any?

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PATRICK F. QUINN

Fiction Chronicle[1]

WITH ITS OPENING PARAGRAPHS, *Pictures From an Institution* establishes itself as a kind of mordant memoir about some people on the faculty of Benton, a women's college of so progressive a character that in one advanced art class (sculpture) the students used blowtorches, and, "in their goggles and masks, looked wonderful, like race-track drivers about to give a *Nō* play." This gag occurs towards the end of the book, but Randall Jarrell is something of a blowtorch-writer and the verbal acetylene flares early and often. In the first chapter the heat is put on Dwight Robbins, president of Benton, and on his wife Pamela. The writer in residence at the college, a novelist named Gertrude Johnson, is seared briefly and then put aside for lavish attention later on. Intermittently there are some cooling-off periods in the novel, for Jarrell knows that a competent satirist must avoid a wholly negative attitude. He should affirm something, too, have something *positive* to offer. And so in the dull, conscientious stretches of the book we meet the sane people: the composer Gottfried Rosenbaum, his wife Irene, their protégée Constance Morgan, and their friend the narrator, a good and guileless man. But at no point does one ask What happens next? The question is, rather, What will Jarrell *say* next, and how well will he do it? The usual things that solidify a novel—story, characters, ideas—are only subsidiary details in this book. They function dimly as props, provide some illusion of context, while front and center in the reader's interest is a verbal performance, as the author demonstrates what can be done with the felicitous and feline phrase. This is the insidious attraction of the book. It is not a well-made novel, scrupulous about point-of-view, structure, pace, and other niceties, nor did Jarrell attempt to make it one. He presents the book as a "comedy", which it sometimes is; and in fact the only really bad joke in the book is one contributed by the publisher. An announcement is made on a fly-leaf that *Pictures From an Institution* is a work of fiction, and hence any resemblances to an actual institution or to actual persons must be regarded as imaginary. More make-believe is packed into this bit of legal fiction than exists in all the pages that follow. There might be some point in thus advertising the book as a *roman à clef* if it were more of a *roman*,

[1]PICTURES FROM AN INSTITUTION, by *Randall Jarrell*. Knopf. $3.50. THE WORLD IN THE EVENING, by *Christopher Isherwood*. Random House. $3.50. THE BLACK SWAN, by *Thomas Mann*. Knopf. $2.75. SWEET THURSDAY, by *John Steinbeck*. Viking. $3.50. GUIGNOL'S BAND, by *Louis-Ferdinand Céline*. New Directions, $5.00. THE GOOSE ON THE GRAVE & THE OWL, by *John Hawkes*. New Directions. $3.00. THE GARDEN TO THE SEA, by Philip Toynbee, Doubleday. $3.00. THE BAD SEED, by *William March*. Rinehart. $3.00. THE BIRD'S NEST, by *Shirley Jackson*. Farrar, Straus & Young. $3.50.

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and if the *clef* were not so easily available. What Benton's real name is, who President Robbins and Gertrude Johnson are—these questions are scarcely interesting since they are so readily, almost instantaneously, solved.

A darker mystery is why the publisher saw fit to surround the book with so large a cordon of appreciative first readers. Half of the dust jacket is used as a billboard for testimonials from Wallace Stevens, Jean Stafford, and some nine others, making up a formidable claque. All this fanfare is offensive. It makes the game look "fixed". No writer, certainly not Randall Jarrell, needs so many sponsors, even for his first novel. And the novel itself is one that neither deserves nor solicits such elaborate protection. One might as well arrange a coming-out party for a king cobra. "Witty", "brilliant", and so on, the book obviously is. But how anyone can speak, as James Agee and Eric Bentley do, of its "humaneness", and of its being rooted in "enjoyment and love" is more than I can make out, though I made a special effort to watch for these qualities. They are not conspicuous in the following: "If I tell you that Mrs. Robbins had bad teeth and looked like a horse, you will laugh at me as a cliché-monger; yet it is the truth." Usually the prose is more adroitly calculated than this; but when Jarrell forgets himself and lets go, as he does in this sentence, the attitude revealed is simply one of naked spite.

Better that, however, than the mealy sentimentality which makes the new Isherwood novel so soggy a fiasco. *The World in the Evening* is a grievously protracted account of how Stephen Monk, a wealthy American in his late thirties, reviews his life, resolves some of the problems that caused him to make a mess of it, and finds in the Quakerism of his Pennsylvania ancestors a possible faith to live by. At the end of it all, neither he nor Isherwood seems to be aware that a number of serious problems remain, among them Stephen's habit of striking inane attitudes and laying claim to insights he has in no way earned. This shows up most clearly in exactly the wrong place: the final lines of the book, a dialogue between Stephen and his divorced wife Jane. The scene is a New York bar, in 1941, Jane speaking:

> ". . . Oh, Steve darling, I do feel so very good about you and me and Roger and everything!"
>
> "It's these cocktails."
>
> "I know it! They're just loaded with faith, hope and charity. I think the bartender must be a saint in disguise. Another one of these, and I'll even forgive Hitler."
>
> "I'll even forgive myself. As a matter of fact, I just have. Do you know something, Jane," I said, as I emptied my glass, "I really do forgive myself, from the bottom of my heart?"

One brief comment here: the martinis consumed in this scene were poured from the shaker Eliot used in *The Cocktail Party*. As I made it out, Eliot's play was an attempt to bring St. Augustine to Broadway in the guise of Noel

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Coward. In *The World in the Evening*, Isherwood has attempted something similar: to endorse (tentatively) the Quakerism of John Woolman by means of a novel in the manner (vaguely) of John O'Hara. Whatever the combination, the Isherwood of *The Berlin Stories* is in no way involved. The only conclusion I can draw from this new book of his is that in the past seven years Isherwood has become much more interested in his work with the Vedanta Society of Southern California than in continuing his career as a novelist.

It is more difficult to decide what line to take on *The Black Swan*. The easy solution would be to say ponderously about Mann's new book, as about Isherwood's, that it "represents a decline". And no doubt, when set against much of his earlier work this short, enigmatic novel seems a diminished and impoverished thing. It may be that Thomas Mann, as he enters his eightieth year, is writing now mainly for his own amusement, indifferent about acclaim, perhaps bored with the thought of attempting another "masterpiece". All that is over and done with. Somewhat like Yeats in the final phase of his career, or more like the Beethoven of the late *Bagatelles*, he has given up the great subject and the grand manner, and turned to the writing of small things, to composing bizarre and sardonic finger-exercises. *The Black Swan* is an étude of this kind.

It is a perplexing book because despite its modern setting the author's interest is in a number of ideas and attitudes that were fashionable in a minor way over a century ago. The substance of the story is curious enough; and its style, elaborately formal and at times deliberately stilted, is another odd and puzzling feature. But I think the strangeness of the book is due chiefly to its antique theme and to the quaint motifs by which the theme is suggested. Here, for instance, in one of the key passages of the novel, we come upon a detail of landscape that recalls the remote and sticky atmosphere of Baudelaire's "Une Charogne":

> The small area represented a meeting-ground of animal, or perhaps human, faeces with some sort of putrid vegetation, and the greatly decomposed body of some small woodland creature seemed to be present too. In short, nothing could be nastier than the teeming little mound; but its evil effluvium, which drew the blow-flies by the hundreds, was, in its ambivalence, no longer to be called a stench but must undoubtedly be pronounced the odor of musk.

The effluvium radiated by *The Black Swan* has a similarly baffling ambivalence.

Someone at Knopf compounded this quality by giving the book its present misleading name. Its real title is *Die Betrogene*, a fact worth mentioning since the swan that appears late in the story provides no clue as to what the story may be about, whereas the German phrase clarifies this matter almost at once. The betrayed woman is Rosalie von Tümmler, a widow in her fifties who falls

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in love with her son's tutor, an athletic American named Keaton. Her daughter tries to head off the infatuation, which is almost entirely one-sided, and which seems to her all the more incongruous since Frau von Tümmler has experienced menopause. But all her arguments are ineffective. So excessive is the woman's romantic trust in Nature, and so strong her fixation on Keaton, that she interprets the recurrence of menstruation as a sign that her youthful spirit has triumphed over her aging body. "What a miracle great beneficent Nature has wrought in me," she says, "how she has blessed my faith!" Like Sarah of the Old Testament she finds herself young again. Only briefly, though, and quite wrongly; for soon after this change takes place she becomes mortally ill. In several astonishing pages that only a surgeon may read with either comprehension or equanimity, Mann explores the seat of the disorder: the woman's viscera are a cancerous horror. Yet in dying she whispers to her daughter: "Nature—I have always loved her, and she—has been loving to her child." The irony of this self-deception is not the subtlest stroke in the book, nor is there any reason for Mann's final sentence: "Rosalie died a gentle death, regretted by all who know her." And yet if Mann becomes almost morbid in his saturnine detachment, the story he tells, baroque as it is, nonetheless holds together. Its peculiar chords reverberate. In a minor and certainly not happy sense of the phrase, *The Black Swan* is a memorable book.

Whereas with John Steinbeck's *Sweet Thursday* the impulse is to forget the thing as soon as possible. This is very easily done. Possibly someone who enjoyed the earlier romp along Cannery Row will be willing to go back there again to see what's become of old Doc, and Mack, and the other fellers, and to tell the girls at the Bear Flag hello. But I doubt that even prior acquaintance with this strenuously antic crew will make a return visit bearable. Not all of Steinbeck's characters are oafs and floozies, but they are all professional, crashing, bores. This is not their fault (to pretend for a moment they have some reality); it is a consequence of the author's sunny, silly insistence that even his *descamisados* have sleeves to wear their hearts of gold upon. Then, too, there is the unbuttoned bonhomie, the ho-ho and the ha-ha, the knowing wink conferred on the reader as Steinbeck reveals the lower orders at play. This is supposed to add up to "summer reading", light fare; and it has, to be sure, all the nourishment, and the consistency, of frozen custard or prune whip. There is a market for such staples, and a market for such a book as this. Bret Harte found that out when *he* lived in California in the 1850's and there invented the formulas by which so much local-color writing has been vitiated ever since. *Sweet Thursday* is saccharine proof that Bret Harte's formulas are still the best for their purpose.

It would be a help at this point if we could go on to some rash genius who has thrown formulas and caution to the winds and has come up with a novel not only new but really good, or at least enjoyable. Instead, we confront the

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three doggedly experimental efforts of Céline, Hawkes, and Toynbee. Although a great deal of conviction and energy must have gone into the writing of these books, one can barely summon the energy needed to read them, and the requisite amount of conviction is never approximated. *Guignol's Band* reads as if Céline were trying to imitate one of his own disciples, Henry Miller. However, he has neither Miller's nerve nor his wit, and instead of these limited assets we find merely vulgar flummery tricked out in telegraphic phrases annoyingly punctuated. There should be a name for this sort of thing; I suggest *le zootsuitisme*. Céline gleefully promises that more of the same may be expected from him. About the busy allegorical nightmares of John Hawkes the right remark was made recently by Vivian Mercier: "Kafka takes basically simple imagined situations and gives them multiple and complex symbolic meanings; Mr. Hawkes' situations are complex, but his meanings—those that reach this reader, anyway—are fundamentally sophomoric. . . ." Philip Toynbee also has something simple to say—in substance *The Garden to the Sea* has about the same density as Isherwood's novel—but what a production he makes of saying it! Adam, the central character, lies comatose on a hospital bed. Toynbee splits the man's personality four ways, and as Adam, Noel, Tom, and Charley he engages himself in a series of conversations that recall the events of his past life. At the end these fractions all add up, or cancel out, and the man is made whole. Since the various speeches are printed in the format of a play, the story has a deceptively dramatic appearance. Actually, it is as inert as its etherized hero. I have no idea what the fiction of the future may be like, in, say, fifty years from now; but I doubt that Toynbee, Hawkes, and Céline are showing the way. If the novel is to be renovated, more is needed for the task than the various "gimmicks" on which these three writers put so heavy an accent.

This easy truism may help define the superiority of *The Bad Seed* and *The Bird's Nest* over the three novels just dismissed. In some ways, both William March and Shirley Jackson seem relatively tame, almost old-fashioned writers, for they avoid frenetic mannerisms and they bear in mind the possibility that the reader's interest is not one of the *données* they are working with. Hence, unlike Céline and company, they have more than one obsessive card to play. Neither novel is a milestone of any sort, nor even much of a yardstick. But they are both unusually skillful jobs, expertly written, and, for a change, interesting. They also have in common the risk of becoming merely case-histories of the appalling mental disorders that unbalance their central characters. However, both writers avoid this trap, a dangerous one for March, especially. He might have given his story a clinical cast, overplayed it as melodrama, or, worse, done both. In fact, *The Bad Seed* comes out remarkably well. The triumph of the book is the portrait of Rhoda Penmark, a little monster of nine, criminally insane, and already an accomplished, professional murderer. But March thickens his plot effectively by giving much of his

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attention to the child's mother as her understanding of the horror increases and the need for decision becomes increasingly urgent. In developing this side of the problem March is forced to stagger under the heavy weight of contrivance. As a result, his story sprawls in the middle, but then picks itself up for an astonishing finish.

On the other hand, *The Bird's Nest* ends rather lamely, though the book as a whole is an even more spectacular performance than *The Bad Seed*. Brilliant in its central sections, it gets a little fuzzy around the edges. Given the enormity of the heroine's difficulties, we should like to know more about their origins, and something, at least, about their cure. Both problems are too casually finessed. But there can be no complaints about the way Miss Jackson has managed the extraordinary situations that make up the heart of the novel. They result from the psychological fission of Elizabeth Richmond into four separate personalities: Elizabeth, Beth, Betsy, and Bess. This reminds us of Toynbee's supine hero, but Adam hit it off splendidly with his various selves, whereas in the Richmond case the four egos are not even on speaking terms. In their struggle for dominance they replace one another in rapid and hectic succession, with consequences that are absurd, terrifying, hilarious. Especially the last, for the great scene in the book is one in which the girl's aunt watches her niece take four successive baths and observes at the end that Betsy, the last in the tub, is finishing off the box of bath salts that was opened by Beth not an hour before. This fantastic episode is made credible, by the way; and Miss Jackson is no less a virtuoso in her presentation of the harassed, stoic aunt and the antiquarian psychiatrist who somehow manages to muddle his way through the case. To describe so original and lively a book one is reluctant to fall back on *tour-de-force*. Yet that tired old phrase does fit *The Bird's Nest*, and it fits *The Bad Seed* equally well. Which is one way of saying that on the score of significance both books are about equally thin. One notices this only in afterthought, however, for in all the novels we have been considering the same weakness prevails, and in most of the others it is far more pronounced. Altogether it has been a dull season in fiction, but it would seem much more so if the novels of William March and Shirley Jackson had not arrived in time to brighten it a bit.

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SONYA RUDIKOFF

A Negative Heroine

KATHERINE MANSFIELD, A Biography, by *Antony Alpers*. Knopf. $5.00.

MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS AGO *The Criterion* printed a small obituary notice of Katherine Mansfield's early death, noting that if she had lived she would have become one of their contributors. If she had not died in Fontainebleau of tuberculosis in 1923, Katherine Mansfield might have been sixty-five today and perhaps an important writer, for she was very gifted, and before she stopped writing, she was beginning to do her best work. . . .

So begins every comment, every article, every notice about this sad, struggling, suffering writer, and I feel almost an injunction to do it once more, now when I have her new biography here before me. "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" and "The Garden Party" are probably as well-known as short stories can be, and Katherine Mansfield's accomplishments with that form are clearly recognized. Yet, inevitably, her skills, her intentions, her stories must be spoken of, as they usually are, with sadness and painful speculation, because she died before the fulfillment of her promise. Her story is an affecting one, indeed, almost too affecting, and it accounts for a great deal of her fame. But, if she has become a kind of modern heroine—all promise and talent and suffering and despair—perhaps it is because her death is affecting not only in itself but also as a too closely significant paradigm: every young person of gifts can fear that his promise will not be fulfilled, and—in this modern world—not only because of death.

The First World War was a time for such deaths of poets or artists or gifted young people, and English literary history records many of them. In fact, in her life and promise and early sad end, Katherine Mansfield has often been thought to resemble Keats. It was a similarity that she herself made explicit when she contracted the disease from which they both died young, slightly more than a century apart. The resemblance, however, puts a burden on her; it can be irritating if it is made to mean too much, because they were really very different. Keats' talent was fulfilled in a way that Katherine Mansfield's was not. We feel about Keats that his death was tragic, but it never seems a comment on him or on his poetry. The "Ode to a Grecian Urn", the "Ode to a Nightingale" would not themselves have been improved although they might have been surpassed; but there is little of Katherine Mansfield's that shows an equally independent excellence, and the sadness about her is expressed in just the conviction that she would have done better. And then in the illness which killed these two writers, the parallel fails to illuminate. Lionel Trilling has spoken of Keats'

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manliness, geniality, and heroism, *especially* in relation to his illness, and he thinks of Keats as a "last image of health at the very moment when the sickness of Europe began to be apparent". And even if Kenneth Burke sees the movement of Keats' imagery as symbolic of the phthisic fever and the phthisic chill, no insight ever points to the kind of intimate connection between illness and work which is so very modern and close. But with Katherine Mansfield the connection is inescapable; we cannot speak of her geniality or heroism, something else seems to be involved. It is still possible to take Keats' death as something *given,* but I do not think it is possible to do this with Katherine Mansfield. Unlike Keats, she set her aesthetic and moral standards so high that they paralysed her; the ideal was so pure that she succumbed to the sense of her own unworthy impurity. In the end she was a very negative heroine, if heroic at all, and it is this—more than all the foolishness about feminine mysticism and feminine sensitivity—that accounts for much of the irritation one may feel at the public image of her.

When a biographer of Katherine Mansfield is himself a New Zealander, who learned to read in the house where she once lived, he has a special relation of intimacy with his subject; and in Mr. Alpers' book it is this very dedication which often makes him an uncomfortably zealous advocate. His view of his famous compatriot ("the only peacock in New Zealand's literary garden") is a very personal one: it is of a colonial who needed to escape and yet was, in a sense, "corrupted" by her experience of England and the Old World; but she found salvation in writing of New Zealand. Mr. Alpers tells us he learned to read "Run, boy, run" in her house in Wellington—a significant text. So it is not surprising to find his parochialism both a help and a hindrance to the exploration of his subject. The New Zealand view is useful when he reconstructs Katherine Mansfield's background or conveys her yearning for England or for the recovery of her childhood feelings. Yet it is sometimes too special, and it almost makes her into a Mistral of the Antipodes without a larger reference. A greater and related danger is that it can lead to certain sacrifices of judgment; for example, it leads Mr. Alpers to a false view of the literary situation Katherine Mansfield knew: he sees England of 1910-1920 much as it might have been seen by the author of *Bliss,* and she becomes, in his pages, a greater literary challenge than she really was at that time. Then, his special view prevents him from making the best use of his new material—his correspondence with Katherine Mansfield's first husband, and his intimacy with Ida Baker, the "L. M." of her letters and journals, who has furnished him liberally with valuable memories. For example, those who are interested in Katherine Mansfield have been puzzled by her relationship to the friend whom she gave the name "Lesley Moore"; and John Middleton Murry's 1951 edition of his former wife's letters only raised further questions about the apparent martyrdom suffered by this friend during her years of attendance on the confused, imperious, and finally

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tubercular writer. Yet Mr. Alpers' strongest assumption about it is that the much-wronged "L. M." was beautifully fulfilled in her role as nurse, companion, and errand-boy to Katherine Mansfield. Now, writers are frequently unpleasant, especially when they are ill; and their wives, husbands, friends, or companions may suffer deeply at their hands or make great and terrible sacrifices of personality. But, even when such devotion deserves respect, how far can a biographer really accept the sacrifice of another's life for his subject, without giving us the sense that he may accept anything at all? How much of a partisan shall he be?

Perhaps, in this case, he must be a very loyal one, to write about those last years of terrible suffering, that wild search for cures, the derangements, the crises (which Mr. Alpers relates very ably to her stories), and then that sad end at Fontainebleau under a cryptic gravestone: "But I tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety." But even the empathy which was necessary need not have prevented him from seeing that Katherine Mansfield's problems—as a woman no less than as a writer—were not really unique; she was not such a special case as he makes her out to be. Neither at that particular time, nor in a general sense, were her strains and stresses so different or so remote from those in the lives of other writers. Forster was born nine years earlier than she was, Edith Sitwell a year before, Virginia Woolf was a contemporary; T. S. Eliot was born in the same year, 1888. There are even some interesting parallels between the career and feelings of the New Zealander and those of the poet from Missouri; all of his early poetry and especially—*obviously*—"The Waste Land" would have been relevant, but Eliot is mentioned only once, and the other contemporaries are only named. And there was D. H. Lawrence, three years older than Katherine Mansfield; he survived her by seven years and died in 1930 of the same disease. Mr. Alpers devotes a chapter to the friendship of the Lawrences and the Murrys, but he is not seriously interested in its ideas.

But then neither was Katherine Mansfield herself. The thought of Lawrence suggests how little she responded to his ideas, even though she was annoyed by them; how imperfectly she saw the situation that provoked them, and how little rigour she had even for her own ideas. For, if it is hard for us to take Gurdjieff seriously or to feel anything but despair at her final months in his Institute, we can remember that it was even hard for her: at one moment he seemed so much like a carpet salesman from the Tottenham Court Road. Yet she went to Fontainebleau, she did what he ordered, she breathed the exhalation of cows. I have always wondered how it was that Gurdjieff seemed the only solution for her at that time. Sometimes it is hard to read of her desire for miracles, her ambiguous attachments to doctors, Russians, Murry, "L. M.", her difficulities with work, her self-abasement, her final attachment to Gurdjieff—without revising her story, without supplying some more positive, less destructive method that might have helped her to a greater exercise of her talents.

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For example, psychoanalytic ideas were not unknown then in London, they were in the air all over Europe, and a relation to them might have precluded the final ambiguous conversion to Gurdjieff. Think of her complaints and troubles, and then all those doctors and healers with their special cures—but did no one ever suggest an analyst? This is outrageous, of course; one cannot do it with writers, especially dead ones. Yet it is worth noting that one would hardly venture such a suggestion for Keats, or, a closer example, for Proust, or even for Lawrence or Eliot. The fact that it can be ventured for Katherine Mansfield is not insignificant; it contributes to the feeling of dissatisfaction one may have about this disturbed and gifted woman who wanted so much to be pure and to be a good writer, and who died before she felt she could be either one.

In the end, however, she did not wish to live. When her cherished brother, Leslie, was killed in 1915, she wrote in her journal: "First, my darling, I've got things to do for both of us, and then I will come as quickly as I can." It is very explicit, this wish for death. The "things to do" were the stories she wanted to write about their New Zealand childhood; she wrote what she could, and in less than eight years she followed him.

Can anyone fail to be struck, in this wretched story, by the conjunction of rage and illness, or by the intimate connections of love and tuberculosis? It was a similar conjunction that marked Lawrence's life; and *The Magic Mountain* (1924), which is surely about love and illness, may be taken as a sign that this conjunction was not unnoticed or unfelt then. "The Waste Land" is another sign of it, as is Proust, and there are many others. In some ways it was peculiar to the time, although it is still a central modern conjunction. And, possibly the real fault of Mr. Alpers' book is that he shows too little interest in *this* dimension of experience, which was so clearly—more than New Zealand, really—a condition of Katherine Mansfield's work and death.

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THOMAS BARBOUR

Playwrights or Play-Writers[1]

IT COMES ALMOST AS A SURPRISE to note that *The Living Room* is Graham Greene's first exercise in dramatic form. We know of the movie versions of his "entertainments" (*The Third Man, This Gun for Hire,* etc.) and of a play based upon *The Heart of the Matter,* but these were all dramatizations by other hands.[2] In view of his considerable, if indirect, connection with the theatre, however, it is even more surprising that *The Living Room* is still the work of what I should call a play-writer, not that of a playwright. By this distinction I mean that Greene has been less attentive to the structure of his play than to the ideas that structure is intended to support; in other words, his is a case of—in Greene's instance—a primarily religious apprehension of the problems of the stage, rather than a fundamentally theatrical apprehension of a problem of religion.

The impression from reading the play, which might be corrected by seeing the production promised to be brought from London to New York, is that it is talky. Now "talkiness", as anyone who has taken a script to a producer or an agent must know, is a favorite term of reproval in the vocabulary of commercial theatre criticism, so that one may take it to apply to any play or scene that is not constantly interrupted by embraces, gun-shots, pratfalls, or slamming doors. Actually the term is effectively little more than a synonym for dullness, for, as Shaw can teach us, talk can make a good play—but it must be good talk. Greene's dialogue, though more literate than we have been accustomed to in the theatre, is something short of Shavian. Moreover, Greene has set himself a far thornier problem than any Shaw had to face in the most discursive of his discussion plays. Shaw's characters are always highly articulate, sometimes almost incredibly so; talk has for each of them the positive force of a weapon in the hand, cudgel or rapier as the case may be, and the clash of ideas, when Shaw is at his best, is as strenuous as and more exciting than any mere physical conflict. But the crucial conversation in *The Living Room* is between a physically (and, somewhat, spiritually) paralysed priest and a willful, not to say neurotic, young woman whom he would redeem from adultery. Their

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[1]THE LIVING ROOM, by *Graham Greene.* Viking. $2.50. FIVE PLAYS, by *Edmund Wilson.* Farrar, Straus and Young. $6.50. TWO PLAYS ("The Maids", "Deathwatch"), by *Jean Genet.* Grove Press. $4.75.

[2]*The Heart of the Matter,* produced in 1949 by Rodgers and Hammerstein, closed in Boston before it completed its pre-Broadway run. Having seen it, I should say its closing was justified only by the inadequacy of the production. It is a superior play to *The Living Room* and worth somebody else's trying.

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encounter is rather like that of two punch-drunk pugilists, a battle of one who cannot make himself intelligible with one who cannot bring herself to understand; and such a struggle is deprived at the outset of the very dynamism that would make it theatrically effective. The action that develops from it is only negatively arrived at; Rose's death is a consequence of, not the force, but the inefficacy of Father Browne's talk.

Finally, for the non-Catholic reader *The Living Room* presents much the same difficulty as Eliot's *The Cocktail Party,* a play with which I suppose it is bound to be compared: the Catholic point of view, which is implicit always in the play, is never presented. In fact there is no character in the play who can satisfactorily represent this point of view: Rose's lover is a nominal Protestant; Rose is a lapsed Catholic ("half a Catholic", she calls herself); and the faith of Father Browne and his sisters has degenerated into formulas, as he realizes and they, at least until the end, do not. And yet the thinking of all of them, with the exception of Michael Dennis, the lover, is profoundly and efficiently conditioned by the doctrines of their faith. For one untutored in or unsympathetic to that faith, the talk cannot easily be understood as illustrated by the play's action. To him Michael and Rose must appear as anything but "star-cross'd lovers"; in fact, they scarcely seem to be lovers at all. He is a middle-aged man still sentimentally attached to a nagging wife; she is a petulant and selfish child flattered by an older man's attentions. Stripped of the metaphysical overtones that have been forced upon it, their situation seems a rather ordinary, if rather messy, affair, hardly warranting the fate Greene has scheduled for it. If it were left alone, I should not be prepared to give it more than six months; and a more competent confessor than Father Browne, with more sense of the realities of the case and less concern for his own theology, might have speeded its dissolution by giving Rose a spank and a shake and a ticket to Paris, where she might cool off till the whole thing blew over. Given the metaphysical garnish, it is hard for the unorthodox not to take *The Living Room* as an anti-Catholic play, which Greene certainly never intended. The author might have found the room in a novel fairly to present his case, realizing there what here must be taken for granted; as it is, I am afraid he has been thwarted by the compressive requirements of an unaccustomed form.

Edmund Wilson is ingratiatingly candid in the preface to his *Five Plays* ("frankly a sales talk"). "I have always been", he declares, "particularly susceptible to the theatre, and the stories that take shape in my imagination are likely to do so in dramatic form." On the evidence of the plays, it is easy to believe this statement, though one might quibble about his choice of the word "dramatic"; in fact he is clearly so thoroughly stage-struck that it is a shame to have to note that four, at any rate, of his five plays are very bad plays indeed. It is much to Wilson's credit, however—and I mean nothing snide by this—

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that his approach to the theatre is anything but blasé; his unacademic enthusiasm is a dishearteningly rare attribute of American non-dramatic writers, and it is especially refreshing to find it in a literary critic of Edmund Wilson's acknowledged distinction. But he is nonetheless guilty of confounding the appearance with the substance of theatricalism with the result that his very enthusiasm has undone him as a playwright, for he has managed to embrace with incredible fervor just about every comic and melodramatic cliché in the business. Though all the gimmicks are there, from a dream sequence to an on-stage explosion (with a clutch of mysterious strangers and unwed mothers by the way), the plays unhappily fail to show, not only any over-all theatrical vision, but even an adequate control of the most rudimentary mechanics of playwriting. Plots meander; expositions are hopelessly contrived; characters appear gratuitously without any preparation, announce themselves, and take over the action while those who seemed obviously designed to be the principals are lost in the shuffle; attitudes and relationships change, apparently arbitrarily in the absence of any disclosure of motives; and implausibilities in timing abound, which (where no framework of fantasy is established) can only appear as ludicrous.

Moreover, for an essayist who has shown considerable felicity in his command of language, Wilson is a strikingly inept writer of dialogue. Take this interchange (with typical business) from *The Crime in the Whistler Room:* Simon, having outlined for Bill (she's a girl) a rather uninspiring plot for a story he plans to write, concludes, "Of course, that's all pretty crude—but you see the idea, don't you? Don't you think it sounds pretty good?"

> BILL: I think it's wonderful!
> SIMON: I think you're wonderful! *(He offers her the flask.)*
> BILL: Oh, you don't reelly [*sic*] think I'm wonderful! (*She takes another drink.)*
> SIMON: Yes, I do: I think you're wonderful. I think you're the most wonderful girl down here—the most wonderful girl I know! *(As she hands him back the flask)* The little face is beginning to light up again!
> BILL: I'm still worried about something, though.
> SIMON: And the reason I think you're wonderful is because you appreciate instinctively everything that's living and fine!

I do not think the low voltage of this affectionate chatter between two disciples of intellectual freedom can entirely be blamed on the date of the play (1924) or the contents of the flask (unidentified). The following unexceptional sentence (from *The Little Blue Light*) is calculated to break the jaw of any actor; it is certainly a pretty heavy-handed tribute for any husband to pay his wife:

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> What's always been miraculous to me and has given me such guts as I've had lately has been just exactly that fact: that an obstinate old-timer like me, a journalist who still takes journalism seriously, an American who still believes that this country has a great contribution to make to the progress of civilization—that a person like me had made contact, an actual vital contact, with one of the most gifted young people of your nineteen-forty crop that grew up without any illusions.

I should like to say a separate word about the latest play in the collection, *Cyprian's Prayer*. I am not sure that it should have been published, not in its present version anyway; but I think I should like to see it produced (an off-Broadway house might take it), duly edited by a knowledgeable and sympathetic director. Not only are the mechanical flaws far less obtrusive than in the other pieces, but its story—an elaboration of the Sorcerer's Apprentice legend, set in fifteenth century France—has some attraction, and the ideas it generates are rather engaging. If Edmund Wilson were a much younger man and this were his first play, it would probably be described as "promising"; there may indeed be hope for him yet.

As for the remaining four plays, their chief—I should say only—value is as a chronicle of the manners and mores of the 'twenties, with *The Little Blue Light* (dealing, as its author says, "with the same sort of people in a later and even more desperate stage") serving as a kind of epilogue. There are far more readable and more perceptive chronicles than this tetralogy; but the same ingenuous crudity that makes them nigh impossible to take seriously as plays lends them, nevertheless, a degree of primitive charm. I doubt that Wilson would be happy to be called a theatrical Grandma Moses, but, in all conscience, that is the best that I can do for him.

Jean Genet's characters are intrigued by criminals and crime; so are many of Edmund Wilson's, especially his "liberated" heroines. In the case of the latter, the fascination amounts to a somewhat naive, moth-and-flame flirtation with danger; what chiefly attract are the incidental or precedent qualifications of the criminal, his cynical materialism, his practical self-reliance, his lack of sentimentality, his scorn for hypocrisy, and so on. But Genet's people—good existentialists that they are—recognize the true criminal, not by his declared capacities, but only by the fact of his crime; and they are motivated by a kind of compulsive psychosis (involving unmistakable homosexual overtones) that can be satisfied, not merely by association with, but by imitation of the criminal so that its victims must be, actually or potentially, criminals themselves.

Genet does not present his characters, as Wilson does, in the framework of an acknowledged social and moral order, but rather in an exclusive world of their own, a topsy-turvey world in which Death is Life and Evil, Good. Since no reference is ever made to any other, we must presume that this world is

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Genet's, too; and, as a result, the experience of Wilson's plays is as different from that of Genet's as reading a psychologist's case-book differs from conversing with a madman. The only appeal that Genet can make is to our own morbid curiosity or, perhaps, to our own perversity. I do not suppose any critic is entitled to recommend him for such an appeal, any more than he may properly recommend a work of pornography, however much pleasure he may take in it in his unofficial hours.[3]

Just the same, I should not like to write off *The Maids (Les Bonnes)* and *Deathwatch (Haute Surveillance)* as simply the products of a decadent and somewhat sordid mentality. They are plays—rather long one-act plays—and it is as plays that they must be here considered. *Deathwatch,* the first to be written though the second to be produced, is an essentially valid dramatic conception that does not quite succeed in the execution. Lefranc envies his fellow-convict Green-Eyes, a condemned murderer; he hopes to emulate him, only to earn his disgust, by killing their cell-mate, Maurice. There is a deal of rambling and confused talk (competently translated by Bernard Frechtman) before the catastrophe is accomplished, which not even the subtle interplay of relationships between the three prisoners is quite able to sustain. An expiatory dance by Green-Eyes provides a moment of pure theatricalism that does not quite come off; it strikes me rather as forced upon the situation of the play than developed cogently from it.

A comparable ritualistic device is used in *The Maids,* but this time to estimable advantage. Two maids plan to murder their mistress, and we discover them—one taking the mistress's part—ceremoniously acting out the contemplated murder. They are interrupted by their employer's arrival, and the killing promises to be literally accomplished. Thwarted again, the maids resume their ritual, which one of them is content to bring to a pretended conclusion only to have her pretense capped by the actual death of her companion. The repetitiousness of the action has the cumulative effect of playing up a musical scale only as far as the leading tone, which insists more strongly with every repetition upon its resolution in the tonic; there is a very real sense of katharsis with the achievement of the catastrophe. The theatrical effects in *The Maids* do not appear to be simply stagey tricks, for the inventions are so devised that they seem to come, not from Genet, but from the maids themselves; their contrivances develop from their characters, which, in turn, are illuminated by their own devices. Despite some execrable excesses in the dialogue ("My spurt of saliva is my spray of diamonds!"; "I, who trimmed my belly with pins to stab

[3]The phenomenon of Genet's popularity in France is immensely interesting and, I think, important. I find it very hard to resist discussing it here, but cannot see how justice can be done to the subject within the limits of this review. Accordingly I must mention Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to the *Two Plays* only in this footnote. While it sheds light on Genet himself, it is singularly unhelpful—even fatuous—as dramatic criticism in the narrow sense of the term that must apply in the present instance.

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all the foetuses I threw into the gutter!"), the play is clearly the work of a writer who is very much at ease in the theatre.

I cannot help believing that Genet has profited greatly from having developed his talents in a society that recognizes an intellectual union of the practitioners of literature and of the theatre, one where writers are used to approaching the stage without our all-too-customary condescension. He may have been helped, too, by the fact that he is neither a critic, nor primarily a novelist, but essentially a poet; as such he is gifted with the ability to select, to compress, and to synthesize, which may serve any playwright in good stead. By this gift he has been able—though to a lesser extent in *Deathwatch* than in *The Maids*—to realize his characters completely in terms of his plays; nothing is brought to the characters that does not serve the action, and nothing to the action that does not illuminate character. The matter of Edmund Wilson's theatre might better be expounded in a social chronicle, and that of *The Living Room* better developed in a novel; but, whatever may be said in its disparagement, the substance of Genet's plays cannot be imagined in any other form. To say as much is not necessarily to acclaim him as a great artist, but it should suffice to identify him as a true playwright.

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WILLIAM ARROWSMITH

The Diapers of Odysseus

THE MUSE AT LENGTH, A Psychoanalytical Study of the Odyssey, by *Arthur Wormhoudt,* Ph.D. Christopher Publishing House. $2.75.

IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD the *Odyssey* was interpreted as an allegorical history of the Jews; this new study by Arthur Wormhoudt, Ph.D., definitively replaces it. Against all probability, I must insist at the outset that Dr. Wormhoudt's book actually exists; nor is it, despite its apparent parody of Homer, psychoanalysis and literary criticism, merely an elaborate hoax. It is a passionate and devoted psychoanalytical investigation of the *Odyssey,* designed to recover the *informational,* as opposed to the esthetic, content of the poem. Dr. Wormhoudt wisely expects resistance, even exasperation, from his readers, but he warns us in advance that resistance to his thesis can be discounted as the rumblings of our own taboos on polite discussion of anal aims; it is thanks to "the extreme vagueness of literary studies" and the "ubiquitous psychic masochism" that we are apt to reject these new truths out of hand. And if this impenetrable shroud were not enough, we are told that misunderstanding will mean "loss of contact with one of the richest sources of spiritual insight men have achieved". That insight comes to this: whatever the *Odyssey* may mean as literature, it is, as information, a defence on the poet's part designed to conquer the post-uterine conflicts of his childhood by exhibiting them fully to the voyeurism of the reader.

Any child, goes the argument, makes successive responses in the form of defences to the major facts—mostly nutritional and sexual—of his world. First comes the *breast-complex,* a defence which arises from the child's resentment of his mother's breast because it affronts his foetal megalomania and emphasizes his helpless oral passivity. The needs of his ego carry him forward from the acute masochism of this phase to the *positive oedipus complex* in which reconciliation with the mother's breast is effected through hostility to the father. Here the child is offered in his double excretory functions the means of articulating his feelings: anal elimination expresses rejection of the father, while urine is the child's proud self-created love-offering to his mother. But now, alas! toilet training supervenes, teaching the child that his style of self-expression is socially unacceptable, and forcing him on to a third defence, the *negative oedipus complex.* In this phase he succeeds in reconciling himself with the father by adopting the feminine role of identification with the mother. The series is complete when the child, identified now with both the maternal *ring-*

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symbol and the paternal *finger-symbol,* succeeds in demoting the threatening breast to a mere passive mouth like his own. Beyond the temporary dike established by these defences rages the terrible adult sea of sexuality, still to be conquered.

The *Odyssey* is to be read as a journey forward—with occasional regressions —through this series of defences. Odysseus is of course the *persona* of the poet (with Telemachus cast as a kind of *persona* Jr.); the suitors whose greedy mouths drain his substance stand for the oral passivity of the breast-complex which the hero must conquer. The father-*image* is Poseidon, and Odysseus' close relationship with Athena is the feminine identification of the negative oedipal phase. Slowly but surely the hero makes his way through the terrors which threaten him: first through the treacherous mountains of the breast which tower over the amniotic sea (Calypso's Ogygia is the womb from which the journey begins); then the long positive oedipal conflict with Poseidon and his son, Cyclops (a very complex symbol presenting elements common to all three defences), and finally the titanic struggle with the suckling suitors, and the last peaceful harbor of the negative oedipus complex. Penelope, among other things (a type of the weaving Fate whose thread is the child's umbilicus) is the last manifestation of the Protean ogre of the breast, and the long night in the big bed signifies the hero's success in de-moting her from a dread-breast to a mere ring-symbol. The closing book is a threnody in which the breast-complex (personified by the slain suitors) is carried off for decent and well-deserved burial.

But it is in the richness of detail, the texture, that the familiar seascape is most powerfully transfigured. Thus the "dark-skinned Aethiopians" stand for "the anal cleft" (like the Saracens in *The Song of Roland*). Any horse, any mountain, reveals the formidable shape of the breast. Nausicaa is not only pure, but a foreshadowing symbol of purgation, washing away at the stained linen of the child who speaks with the voice of his sphincter. Nestor of the honied tongue, the tamer of horses, is the father to whom the son is "anally reconciled". The Trojan Horse has "pseudo-homosexual overtones", and the famous root, *moly,* with which Odysseus defends himself against Circe, is not a phallus at all, but a complex symbol standing both for the breast (it has a *milk*-white flower) and anal stool (a black root). Circe is one more bitch of the Breast, and Odysseus' success in bedding her means that he has defeated his "anal autarchy". But "the lady has too many oral associations about her", and Odysseus leaves for Hades (a fantasy of the anal tract as bringing babies to birth) where he meets Teiresias ("the blind Theban seer who knows the secret of the oedipus complex"). He attempts to embrace the shade of his mother (negative-oedipal-feminine-identification) and sees, as though in a Rotolactor, a procession of famous women: "First comes Tyro, a name which suggests cheese, and hence shows her origin in the breast-complex", etc. Other terrors still await; the

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Sirens (i.e. "masochistic tendencies rooted in the breast-complex") and Scylla and Charybdis ("the either-or choice between succumbing to the breast-complex or the oedipus complex"). We recognize Charybdis from her name, a conflation of "pleasure" and "hidden", and "when we discover that she is a whirlpool over which hangs a fig-tree, we realize that the hidden pleasure is the feminine ring-symbol which the oedipus complex has rendered dreadful. There are anal details in the fact that as she sucks down she reveals the sandy bottom of the sea and as she spews out she roars and rumbles".

Two passages merit quotation in full. The first is an illustrative analogy drawn from Achilles' fight with the river-god Xanthus in the *Iliad:*

> It would seem at first glance as if Achilles is battling with the breast as a source of liquid, but when we remember that Xanthus is a male god, and his name means yellow in Greek, we see that he is a breast symbol which the child has attached to his own body, later projected onto the father, in an effort to give liquid to the mother from whom he has taken so passively. Xanthus is thus a masculine finger-symbol denoting urine. The child's toilet-training, however, teaches him that urine is not an acceptable gift and that he is likely to be rejected. It is this aspect of himself, this anal autarchy, with which Achilles is faced.

If the inter-relationship here between breast, finger, urine and anus is too complex, the account of Odysseus' adventure with Aeolus is comparatively straightforward:

> Odysseus is given an ox-hide containing the unfavorable winds so that he may get safely home. So he sets out and just as he comes in sight of his native country, his men open the bag, thinking it gold and silver. The point of this fantastic incident is that Homer is showing Odysseus making a first step toward self-discipline by controlling the wind, the child's own flatus, within the bag. But the men are greedy for gold—feces—and thus let loose the unrestrained tendencies to give waste products, solid and liquid, which we saw expressed in the blinding of the Cyclops. Toilet-training demands a giving attitude and a withholding attitude nicely adjusted as to time and place. Odysseus and his men have not learned these niceties. When he returns to Aeolus he is rejected as one who has disgraced himself socially before gods and men. . . . Aeolus is also called the son of Hippotas, the horse, and the anal connotations are thus further highlighted.

Against such evidence I can only argue feebly that, like Plato's *Parmenides*, Dr. Wormhoudt's book is neither a joke nor a parody: it is too long, too ingrown, and too seldom anything more than boring. It muddies any other reading of the poem just as it parodies tact and makes an academic science of obscenity: the work, in short, of a Herculean pedant in a self-created Augean stable. I am less certain that the book makes a mock of the psychoanalytical

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investigation of literature, though few critics could handle crude principles so crudely as this. Here, after all, in extreme form, are just those traits that make depth-psychological studies of literature so irritating and stultifying: the closed-circle camouflage, amounting to psychological McCarthyism, that to object to the interpretation is somehow to prove it; the constant suggestion that this is the *real* interpretation and that all others are superficial; a clumsy and devastatingly literal approach to symbolism; the syllogizing of tact; and finally a fanatic singlemindedness that crudifies everything it touches. Above and beyond these failings, Dr. Wormhoudt's particular vice is ignorance: he is innocent of literary criticism and literature alike, and his etymologies make me suspect that he doesn't know Greek from the proverbial hole-in-the-ground.

A COMMUNICATION

Dear Sirs,

In a "Letter from England" in your issue for Summer Mr. Patrick Cruttwell makes about *Scrutiny* and my own criticism some encouraging remarks on which, in general, I will not comment, except to say that I am gratified that he should be able, in spite of finding me "slippery", to judge me "forthright". But he says one thing about which I shall do my best to be found merely forthright: "Early issues (before the war) show a certain flirting with the Marxism then current: but that went soon". This statement (to be forthright) is wholly false: there was no issue at any time that could lend colour to it. *Scrutiny* from the beginning was essentially and outspokenly anti-Marxist. Since the early issues are accessible to so few of your readers I suppose I ought to do something more than just dismiss the matter with: "Look and see!" The Manifesto, then, that appeared in the first issue was conceived as, in its positive proposals, deliberately anti-Marxist: it is to be found in Mr. Eric Bentley's volume of selections from *Scrutiny*, *The Importance of Scrutiny*. Again, there is a long out-of-print book of mine, *For Continuity* (1933) which may perhaps be found in some libraries: in it are reprinted my editorials from the third and fourth issues, "Under Which King, Bezonian?" and "Re-Statements for Critics". These are explicitly and emphatically anti-Marxist. So unambiguous and notorious was *Scrutiny's* anti-Marxism that I had to face, in addition to the hostility of the literary and academic Establishments, a sustained vendetta from the camp of the advanced intellectuals (fashion being Communist and Fellow-travelling). I say "I": they pronounced me the "worst enemy", since, having (they said) great influence with the promising young at the universities, I used it to promote "irresponsibility"—that is, to discredit the doctrine of Dialectical Materialism and the Class War, and of the serious

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person's duty to take the right side (the Left) and be "saved". So long as literary intellectuals brought out Marxising works, *Scrutiny* dealt with them—forthrightly.

But if *Scrutiny,* while repudiating Marxism, refused to be "bound to any ideology", it had nevertheless its own very positive line. What that is in relation to Marxism and Catholicism, and in what sense it is liberal, is defined in my *Education and the University,* which I mention because it is generally accessible, there being an American edition. The substance of the book appeared in *Scrutiny,* of which it expressed the positive position, line or "philosophy". Without such a positiveness of faith, belief and intellectual formulation *Scrutiny* could not have lasted for twenty-one years in the face of the hostility of all the English literary and academic powers. It could not have held together, as it did, a world-wide community, or exercised the influence with which it is now (I believe) generally credited.

Yours truly,

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